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This dissertation explores representations of trauma, healing, and memory in the literature of exile. Traditionally, analyses of this literature adhere to the parameters of ethnicity and national origin; however, I argue that an analytical focus on trauma, healing, and memory rather than ethnicity or national origin reveals discursive strategies that transcend cultural borders. I begin my analysis with a consideration of the representation of rupture from the homeland and its representation in *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina García, *América's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago, and *Geographies of Home* by Loida Maritza Pérez. I argue that authors of the literature of exile portray the traumatic experience of rupture from one's homeland through the immediacy of domestic violence. I then turn to the common thread of folk medicine used by Ann Petry in her work *The Street* and Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun*. These traditional faith practices, primarily brought to America through the slave trade, are utilized by the authors as a source of empowerment for the characters in their texts. A consideration across cultural lines reveals that this is a powerful counter-hegemonic strategy prominent in the landscape of exilic survival. Finally, utilizing Marianne Hirsch's framework of postmemory, I consider the prominent use of the photograph in *Geographies of Home* and Nicole Krauss's *History of Love*. This analysis demonstrates that whether migrant or immigrant, the search for the American Dream, or at least safe haven, follows discernable patterns of rupture, healing, and challenges of "acculturation." This three-tiered analysis

reveals a community of exile portrayed by U.S. women authors and brings transnational and transcultural connections into relief.

BEYOND THE BORDERS OF EXILE: EXILE, IMMIGRATION,  
AND MIGRATION IN U.S. WOMEN'S WRITING

by

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---

Committee Chair

For Mike  
Thank you for your love and support

and

To the memory of my mother  
Carmen Alvarez Padgett  
Who taught us to love life

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA: GARCÍA, SANTIAGO, PÉREZ.....	22
III. REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL HEALING IN <i>THE STREET</i> AND <i>THE LINE OF THE SUN</i> .....	54
IV. THE PHOTOGRAPH AND POSTMEMORY IN KRAUSS AND PÉREZ .....	86
V. CONCLUSION.....	116
WORKS CITED .....	122

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It was the first defiant gesture she had ever made. Up to now she had always accepted whatever happened to her without making any effort to avoid a situation or to change one....And here she was sitting waiting to see the Prophet David—committing an open act of defiance for the first time in her life.

—*The Street*

From the moment I read these words describing the character Min in Ann Petry's *The Street*, asserting her determination to change the course of her life with the help of the root doctor, I was keenly interested in the use of folk healing across cultural lines. I had seen prominent representation of all manner of traditional health and faith practices that originated in Africa and were brought to the Caribbean through the slave trade in contemporary Latina works, but to also see evidence of these beliefs in Ann Petry's novel *The Street* certainly captured my attention. Indeed, this exploration considers intersecting features of the writing of exile, immigration, and migration. While Petry's work was published in 1946, the traditions continue to be embraced by communities today as evidenced by the many *bodegas* I have recently seen on the street corners of Brooklyn; their windows display a colorful array of plants, vials, and other goods to be used in various Spiritism<sup>1</sup> practices. As literature of exile written by women, these texts intersect at the phase of healing in which the female protagonists turn to traditional faith practices of their communities to find a source of empowerment.



Scholarship contained within the bounds of national origin provides invaluable insight to cultural and historical experience; however, I argue that an exploration of the literature of exile, migration, and immigration across cultural lines highlights commonalities among exilic experience and representations. The trauma of rupture from one's homeland, whether from political or economic motivation, the process of healing, and the disappointments and challenges encountered by the immigrant or migrant are remarkably similar. Therefore, rather than consider authors from the same region with like cultural and religious heritage, I explore the congruence of process portrayed in the exile literature of migrants from around the world and from within the geographical borders of the United States, whose "exile" is nonetheless a matter of necessity, for a variety of reasons. In what follows, I examine the representations of trauma in *Dreaming in Cuban*, *América's Dream*, and *Geographies of Home*. I then consider how both *The Line of the Sun* and *The Street* incorporate traditional faith healing practices. Finally, I explore the use of the photograph by second- and third-generation authors within the framework of postmemory.

### Exile in Context

The theory and criticism that treat the literature of exile tend to focus narrowly by ethnicity or national origin. The term "exile" is also debated as to who qualifies and who does not. Yet, the term exile conjures a wide spectrum of definitions and meanings, from the most exclusive, which insists that compulsory banishment be a parameter, to the most inclusive, which allows for the term's usage in the metaphoric sense. In the essay "The Mind of Winter," Edward Said focuses on the aspect of forced separation from one's

homeland, claiming that “[e]xile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (49). He also emphasizes the fact that this condition is one inflicted on humans, by humans. He makes a distinction between the terms “exile,” “expatriate,” and “émigré,” claiming that exile emphasizes “a touch of solitude” whereas expatriate connotes choice. This idea of choice is often a contentious issue that is debated in exile literature, and one that I will address in my project. In *After Exile*, Amy Kaminsky also insists that exile “is always coerced” and that “voluntary exile is...an oxymoron that masks the cruelly limited choices imposed on the subject” (9). However, she goes on to assert that she “imposes no litmus test to discriminate between exiled and expatriate writers” because of her focus on discursive “representations of the process of exile” rather than an author’s biography (9).

Just as Kaminsky appears to step away from a final determination—not having a litmus test—one notes a similar reluctance to judge who “qualifies” as an exile in Nico Israel’s *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora* and an expansion of the parameters of exile. Both claim that their desire to focus on “the writing of displacement” nullifies a need to tackle terms. Israel notes:

I attend to elements in the writing of displacement that raise questions about the relation between subjectivity, language, and the experience and representation of culture and place—without presuming a rigid, a priori definition of any of these terms....Because an undecidability troubles the question of choice versus force and the related distinctions between exile, expatriate, and refugee, these criteria recede as central foci of this inquiry... (14)

He too then asserts that a focus on the writing precludes a need to proclaim exclusive definitions. Both Kaminsky and Israel appear to initially limit the definition of exile by

presenting the aspect of choice, but then step away from the determination. I suggest that this project highlights the reason why these efforts to exclude some from the exile table are problematic. Ultimately, the experience of exile, immigration, or migration inflicts trauma without imposing a “litmus test.”

Sophia A. McClennen confronts the definitions of exile and their relation to choice: “exile typically refers to one who had been forced to leave one’s country,” but contrasts this to the fact that “dictionary definitions of exile often include voluntary absence from the homeland” (15). However, she goes on to assert that exile, diaspora, and refugee are “related to forced dislocations” (15). One can again note the difficulty of putting parameters on the definitions of exile, immigrant, migrant, etc. when she suggests that “these conditions overlap and the literature of immigrants can be interestingly compared with the literature of exiles...” and that these conditions, according to Leon and Rebecca Grinberg, “create similar problems for the transplanted individual” (15). McClennen does go on to cite their claim that the exile’s situation is unique because “the exile’s condition is involuntary and return is impossible” (15).

Ravi Shankar and Jeffrey F.L. Partridge, in their discussion, “The Spirit of Exile,” strike the closest tone to my own vision of inclusivity in this project. Although, again, Shankar mentions that a forced exile is much different than a “voluntary removal,” he goes on to concede that

to bracket the term ‘exile’ as something that can only refer to political exiles is to diminish the very real ways in which other displaced individuals are subjugated by the dominant culture they find themselves in....To sanctify the term ‘exile’ to such a degree that only certain people can be seen as worthy of its moniker would be paradoxically to silence certain stories and to romanticize others. (130)

I argue that the literature of exile, as suggested by Shankar's broader use of the term—in which the idea of leaving one's home is key—includes those who must leave their geographic home forcibly or not, and that the significant aspect for this study is how startlingly similar the experience portrayed in the literature is. Whether one is exiled from another country or forced to migrate within the nation, as in the case of the Great Migration, the traumatic rupture and its consequences are remarkably similar. Kaminsky, Israel, and McClennen all grapple with the parameters of terms, but I focus on the commonality of experience, thus arriving at an inclusive exploration of dislocation that recognizes those who are forced to leave their homeland for political and economic reasons as well as to escape violence.

### Why Women

In a consideration of the literature of exile, immigration, and migration, in which oppression and marginalization on the basis of gender, race, national origin, and ethnicity are key, focusing on the writing of women is paramount. The portrayal of women's experience in exile highlights the multiple oppressions women encounter due to their patriarchal home cultures as well as oppression on the basis of race and ethnicity. Fatima Mujcinovic asserts that “in the case of female experience, marginalization and physical dislocation become negotiated more easily if the space of exile offers emancipation and recognition” (181). In *Reading the Body Politic*, Kaminsky points out that “sexuality remains a constant of women's subordination” and notes that Eliana Rivero similarly “argu[es] that the corrective and necessary focus on difference among women should not erase the similarities among women's situations across class and culture” (xiii, 138).

Mujcinovic and Kaminsky assert the commonality of experience for women in exile, and I argue that consideration of texts of exile, immigration, and migration written by women moves these correspondences to the forefront in a useful way. By focusing on women's writing in my project, I highlight the blurring of racial or ethnic borders and emphasize not only the shared experiences of migration and immigration, but also a common thread of these experiences as lived and portrayed by women who, despite national origin, race, or ethnicity, endure multiple oppressions.

Furthermore, I am interested in the ways in which women's stories highlight certain experiences that are generally understood as primarily female. In the first part of this study, I focus on the way that the trauma of rupture from one's homeland is portrayed through a pronounced representation of graphic violence, usually rape and other forms of domestic violence that has traditionally been used against women in patriarchal societies. Of course, men suffer traumatic experiences as a result of dislocation from their homelands as well; men undergo violence and rape also, but not to the extent that women do. All three texts in the first part of this study include incidences of rape: one at the hands of a partner, one committed by soldiers, and one by a relative. I demonstrate how this high incidence of rape and violence is closely aligned, symbolically, with trauma experienced by the immigrant, not only as a result of political oppressions and exile, but also as an ongoing array of violence perpetrated against women.

I also wish to draw attention to women's writing. Some of the authors I include are well-known and widely anthologized such as Judith Ortiz Cofer and Esmeralda

Santiago. Ann Petry likewise is studied frequently on university campuses. However, I would suggest that these authors are studied fairly strictly within racial and ethnic lines, Cofer and Santiago in Latino Studies courses and Petry in African American ones. These are popular American writers who need to be incorporated into academic inquiry in a variety of ways with a variety of foci. I suggest that through the lens of exile we discover a body of literature that portrays a vast American immigrant and migrant community with similar obstacles and victories, despite differences of ethnic, racial, or national identities.

Although I focus on two novels to explore the use of folk healing and *Santería* in part two of this study, five of my chosen texts make reference to these cultural practices. Emphasizing women's writing highlights the significance of these practices, as they put women's lives and experience at the forefront of their novels. For the women in these texts, folk healing and *Santería* provide a source of empowerment. I delineate how Min in *The Street* and Ramona in *Line of the Sun* utilize these practices to control aspects of their lives. For example, Min is able to save herself, emboldened by the Prophet's prescribed vials and actions. Ramona not only utilizes Spiritism for herself, but proves to be a leader in her community of *El Building*, where her apartment becomes a headquarters for planning and operations. Within what have been traditionally considered patriarchal communities, women's stories become particularly useful for observing survival strategies employed by African American and Latina women.

#### Why These Authors and Novels

Although Cristina García, Esmeralda Santiago, and Nicole Krauss are rarely the subject of comparative analysis, I highlight their participation in a body of work that is an

American literature of exile as well as part of a network of representation of the three elements of trauma, healing, and memory. In García and Santiago the element of trauma is depicted through violence. I also include Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home* in this exploration. Although her work is mentioned, especially as an up and coming Dominican-American author, there is less written about her.<sup>2</sup> Yet, her work actually features all three elements I discuss in this project: prominent violence aligned with trauma, Spiritism beliefs and practices, and postmemory.

All of these authors write from the experience of dislocation in intersecting and overlapping ways. As mentioned, García, Pérez, and Santiago portray the trauma of rupture from the homeland through representations of violence in their texts, particularly through rape. Judith Ortiz Cofer and Ann Petry's texts establish the use of *Santería* and folk healing as strategies of survival for the immigrant or migrant. Both Krauss and Pérez exhibit second- and third-generation discursive strategies that highlight the desire to know a past that has been passed on to them but which has not been experienced first-hand.

My grouping of authors in the chapters that follow is meant to demonstrate the elasticity of terms regarding exile, immigration, and migration when authorial strategies and representation of experience are considered. For example, in chapter two García and Pérez represent tales of political exile and its subsequent trauma. They both utilize domestic violence, rape, and mental illness in a realistic portrayal of violence that is also a metaphor for the political ruptures that both the authors and fictional characters have suffered. Their tales would definitely fall within the "classic" definitions of exile;

however, that is still a problematic assertion, as some of the characters “choose” to leave and others do not. If one chooses to leave communist political oppression is that any less an exile than one who chooses to leave the home country due to an ongoing campaign of domestic abuse and the desire for economic advancement? For example, this is the situation that Esmeralda Santiago portrays in *América’s Dream*.

Santiago’s novel graphically reveals the terrorism of domestic abuse. She aligns the abuse quite explicitly with the political oppression of her island, Puerto Rico, by the United States. Through the incorporation of references to military installations, soldiers, and to the wealthy tourists who come to the island, Santiago portrays the multiple oppressions endured by the protagonist as a Puerto Rican woman. All three novels in chapter two, despite the varied motivating factors of exile or migration—political, economic, or domestic—reveal the trauma of political oppression and rupture from the homeland through the lens of domestic violence and mental illness.

In chapter three, I not only continue to resist petrified categorization of exile, but also of rigid demarcations of texts into racial or ethnic categories and consider the way that Cofer and Petry both utilize folk healing in their texts. Cofer’s characters leave Puerto Rico in search of a better life, economically and educationally, but the mythic American Dream is an elusive one. Ramona’s greatest joy in this new land is her community of *El Building* and her Puerto Rican neighbors. Cofer portrays the significance of the *curandera*/healer figure that disrupts socially prescribed roles. Similarly, Petry utilizes the strategy of turning to beliefs and traditions of the community to empower her character Min. Petry’s text is situated within the movement of The Great



Migration in which blacks moved from the south to the west and north to escape the violence, racism, and lack of economic opportunity of the south. Cofer and Petry's texts demonstrate that, whether migrant or immigrant, those in search of the American Dream experience remarkably similar challenges of "acculturation" and resources for healing. Considering Cofer and Petry's texts together disrupts inquiry along traditional racial or ethnic lines to reveal the commonalities of the migrant experience and its literary portrayal.

In the third phase of my study, I again turn to Pérez's text in a comparative look with Nicole Krauss's *History of Love* to demonstrate the strategies of postmemory evident in both Latino and Jewish texts. Because Loida Maritz Pérez's parents brought her to the United States from the Dominican Republic as a young child, in many ways she can be considered a second-generation immigrant. Some may categorize her as a 1.5 generation immigrant. For the sake of this project, because she was raised in the United States by Dominican parents, I consider her a second-generation immigrant, particularly in light of the exploration here of second-generation authors who portray the struggles of children of immigrants to renegotiate or make sense of their family histories through their literary work. Both Krauss and Pérez utilize the photographic image in their texts prominently. I assert that they both turn to this strategy as second- and third-generation exiles whose work exhibits Marianne Hirsch's theoretical framework of postmemory. Thus, I select these authors and texts as exemplars of U.S. literature of exile, immigration, and migration, and I disrupt categorization on the basis of terms of exile or racial, ethnic, or national origin.

### Theoretical Frameworks

In the chapters that follow, I reference theorists and critics within each of the three themes of trauma, cultural healing, and memory. My aim is not only to be in conversation with leading theorists, but also to disrupt the cultural lines at times adhered to by critics to reveal threads of common elements that promote an inclusive discussion concerning the literature of exile, immigration, and migration. My consideration of trauma focuses on three distinct elements portrayed by authors and debated by theorists. The aspect of authors' "working through" historic and traumatic pasts is a dominant feature in the literature of exile. I argue that the prominent depiction of violence in *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Geographies of Home*, and *América's Dream* displays this process of working through the trauma of leaving one's homeland and negotiating a hostile foreign landscape.

E. Ann Kaplan claims: "Trauma can never be "healed" in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being 'translated' via art" (19). In my view, the intense representation of violence and its continual alignment with references to the political concerns, dictatorships, loss, and oppression reveals this process of working through that Kaplan, and others, is speaking about. Part of working through is not letting anyone forget the harsh political realities endured by Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Jews, African Americans, and Dominicans. When Lourdes in *Dreaming* "scoured her skin and hair with detergents," (72) and Marina in *Geographies* "meticulously scoured herself with Brillo," (19), and América endures

Correa's assault as he "bites her cheeks, her neck, her breasts, and bares her lower body," (109) García, Pérez, and Santiago sear assault on the collective consciousness: "Look, world, what is endured, challenged, and not forgotten."

The argument that political concerns such as hegemonic power structures and the body politic are represented by violence against women, especially rape, is considered to be problematic by some. Zoe Brigley Thompson and Sorch Gunne challenge the assertion that the two—dominance over the body politic and dominance over the body—are aligned, but even within their own text there are dissenting views represented. I propose that the prominence of violence, particularly rape, highlights the tyranny and violence of dictatorships in Cuba and the Dominican Republic as well as the imperialistic presence of the United States in Puerto Rico. Kali Tal and Lisa Fitzpatrick situate these representations of rape within a broader framework of violence perpetrated against women; furthermore, Fitzpatrick argues that this is a subversive tactic when the survivor is not destroyed by the act.

Fatima Mujcinovic and Alison Van Nyhuis speak specifically to the texts I am exploring here. Mujcinovic focuses on one of the characters in *Dreaming*, Lourdes, to argue that the trauma portrayed in this novel is in contrast to that of other exile narratives in that Lourdes distances herself from the homeland because of her traumatic experience and that Lourdes shows signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Van Nyhuis asserts that Santiago writes an explicit connection between the political oppression of Puerto Rico, first by Spain and then the United States, through Correa's abusive relationship with América.

The third element that I address within the theme of trauma is the legacy of survivorship that highlights what Carine Mardorossian would refer to as “trans-generational workings of trauma” (30). Mardorossian explains:

Whether they are grouped under a regional or national rubric, minoritarian literatures tend to circulate tropes and themes that reappear from one novel to another and testify to the workings of a culture’s collective memory across generations. Through these recurring representations, historical traumas become fodder for imaginative reprocessing in ways that both expose and transform past events. (23)

Mardorossian’s claim speaks to the aspect of working through mentioned earlier as well as my focus in this instance on the mother/daughter relationship so critical to signifying the transmission of “collective memory across generations.” *Dreaming, Geographies*, and *América’s Dream* feature mother/daughter relationships prominently. I suggest that foregrounding these relationships highlights significant aspects of exile literature: the passing on of historic traumas and a narrative of resistance that women authors portray that depicts a high degree of survivorship. In chapter two I demonstrate the prominence of violence in the texts in the form of rape and domestic violence; additionally, I explore the manifestation of this violence in the mother/daughter relationship. Both Hirsch and Mardorossian address the significance of this portrayal as well. While Hirsch claims that women authors utilize their portrayals of these relationships to show resistance to traditions of patriarchal cultures, Mardorossian’s delineation (in an analysis of Danticat’s novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*) of the way that mothers simultaneously reclaim and pass on traditions, at times traumatic ones, enriches my own observations of the prominent incidence of mothers’ violent interactions with their daughters.

In my discussion of cultural healing in chapter three, the first task I wish to accomplish is to make clear the link between participants of the Great Migration—migration within the borders of the United States—and immigrants from outside the geographical borders of the United States. Several critics are instrumental in defining this link, which is motivated by the common search for the American Dream for African Americans and Latinos, specifically from Puerto Rico, as I establish through my comparison of *The Street* and *Line of the Sun*. Vernon E. Lattin asserts Ann Petry's questioning of the American Dream vis-a-vis the racist realities of the nation. Similarly, Richard Yarborough highlights these realities as whites prevent black men from being able to achieve the American Dream due to their denial of employment. Furthermore, he asserts that Petry rejects the "relevance of the American Dream" for blacks as racism will attempt to squelch the "ideals" of the American spirit and the drive to succeed. Steven A. Reich helps to put Petry's writing in a historical and literary context explaining that black writers of the 1930's and 1940's

pioneered a new literary style called social realism, which explored with documentary detail the everyday frustrations of migrants in their confrontation with the urban North. Rejecting portrayals of black migration north as an exodus to a promised land, they wrote stories that explored how poverty, unemployment, racial violence, legal injustice, political corruption, and world war restricted the ability of migrants to build new lives in the north. (89)

Certainly, we will see that these features of social realism are evident in Petry's work.

I also suggest that the cultural healing practices expressed in the literature of exile serve to empower, support, and strengthen African and Latino communities. Isabel Wilkerson's work is invaluable to this project in recognizing that participants in the Great

Migration were in many ways like immigrants from other countries. She poignantly demonstrates that blacks were not treated as citizens of the nation, thus their journey north to escape the Jim Crow system. She explains that the Jim Crow system persisted as late as the 1960's. However, those who moved north, as I have mentioned, encountered a hostile environment that did not necessarily meet the promises of the American Dream. Stephanie Mitchem explains that African American communities' observation of folk healing practices entails a form of resistance and serves to give the community a sense of identity. She also situates these practices as participating in a tradition of storytelling that can be traced back to Africa and that provide a space where "their humanity is honored" (38).

Although Reich claims that Petry portrays the commodification of the root doctor (123), Katrina Hazzard-Donald's assessment of the significance of the practices of Hoodoo is more closely aligned with my own. She associates the passing on of tales, beliefs, and practices to generational legacies that link the community to Africa. Tey Diana Rebolledo also speaks to the passing on of beliefs from generation to generation, but not only does she assert the community aspect of the practices of folk healing beliefs, she also encourages a feminist reading. Rebolledo is primarily addressing Chicana writing, but I think her points are evident in Judith Ortiz Cofer's work as well as Petry's. Rebolledo highlights the importance of female bonds in Chicana writing, and—I propose—the writing of other women of color as well.

I engage in a cross-cultural exploration of the way that black folk healing practices discussed here and *Santería* both serve to provide a pathway to agency for

women practitioners, create a space for community identity in the face of a hostile “foreign” landscape, and become a source of cultural healing. Mario A. Núñez Molina specifically addresses the cultural healing aspect of *Espiritismo* for the Puerto Rican community. However, what I am suggesting is a close affiliation among the Hoodoo and *Espiritismo* practices portrayed by the texts in question and being discussed by the critics I have mentioned such as Mitchem, Hazzard-Donald, Rebolledo, and Núñez Molina; the practices, with origins in Europe and Africa, provide the community and practitioners tradition, continuity, healing, and strengthening.

Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory is foundational to my discussion of the use of the photographic image in chapter four. Although her work is primarily directed to considerations related to the Holocaust, its assertions as to the desire on the part of survivors’ children to negotiate an unrecoverable past are applicable to other traumatic historic events as well. In fact, Hirsch explicitly suggests an inclusive application of her theory:

the Holocaust can no longer serve simply as a conceptual limit case in the discussion of historical trauma, memory, and forgetting. Certainly, my analysis is in dialogue with numerous other contexts of traumatic transfer that can be understood as postmemory. In fact, the process of intergenerational transmission has become an important explanatory vehicle and object of study in sites such as American slavery; the Vietnam War; the Dirty War in Argentina and other dictatorships in Latin America....It is precisely this kind of resonance I was hoping for in developing the idea of postmemory throughout my writing on this subject. (18-19)

I expand the discussion of postmemory beyond the parameters of the Holocaust by my consideration of Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* with Nicole Krauss’s *The History of Love*.

There are three aspects of major significance in thinking about postmemory in the novels. The intergenerational sense of what has been lost, its irrecoverability, and the strong desire to bear witness are key elements portrayed in the literature of exile written by second- and third-generation authors. Alan Berger and Asher Milbauer assert Krauss's "artistic preoccupations governing her entire oeuvre" (66). Although their discussion of Krauss focuses on what they consider to be "the Jewish imperative of passing the tradition from generation to generation" (67), I demonstrate how their assertions apply to Pérez's work as well. Phillip Codde identifies Krauss's desire to "commemorate" the Jewish exilic experience. Gerard Bach also points to the "moral imperative" to bear witness to the past atrocities of the Holocaust. He underscores the contemporary authors' determination to use their work in the project of not allowing future generations to forget. I demonstrate that Berger and Milbauer, Codde, and Bach's assertions as to the contemporary Jewish writer's desire to bear witness is accomplished not only by Krauss's use of the photographic image in her text, but also in Pérez's tale of an exiled Dominican family as well.

Pauline Newton explains that

writers of 'younger,' or second or later generations, whether Asian American or Latin American, often have not experienced the traditions and customs of their mother country on its soil....the 'younger' authors represent a particular group of 'hyphenated' U.S. Americans who possess an intense awareness of their migrant heritage even though they do not physically move from their homelands to the United States. (13)

Thus, I merge Newton and Hirsch's frameworks to collapse former barriers of national origin or political motivation for exile and initiate an inquiry that reveals a community of



diaspora who come to the United States or migrate within its borders for a variety of urgent reasons—physical safety, poverty, dictatorships—and who long to know and recover familial histories. I explore the postmemorial strategies, particularly the use of the photograph, Krauss and Pérez deploy in their texts that serve to achieve the goal of weaving together their own fragmented histories as well as their communities' through their creative projects.

### Chapter Summaries

In the next chapter I delineate the various representations of violence that I assert highlight the trauma of rupture from the homeland and political oppressions I have been discussing. It focuses on the Cuban-American Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, Dominican-American Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*, and Puerto Rican Esmeralda Santiago's *América's Dream* as exemplars of the literature of exile. This chapter provides a brief overview concerning the political and economic contexts in which the novels take place, particularly information about Rafael Trujillo for readers who may be unfamiliar with his cruel and lengthy dictatorship. This chapter brings together writers who are themselves exiles and migrants and who portray this reality vividly in their work. Some key original questions that motivate this study come to the fore in this chapter: Why are the pages of these narratives saturated with rape, mental illness, and attempted suicides? Like Moniza Alvi and Alison Van Nyhuis, I consider these depictions reflective of political oppression and Western imperialism. However, like Cathy Caruth, who asserts the "incomprehensibility of human survival," (58) I point out the high degree of survival portrayed by the stories of Celia, América, and Aurelia as

well as their daughters Lourdes, Rosalind, and Marina, to whom mothers and grandmothers have bequeathed a legacy of survival.

Chapter three looks at the common thread of folk healing practices in *The Line of the Sun* and *The Street*. I argue that in these exemplary texts of the literature of exile the authors portray the mythic nature of the American Dream and the way that the women in their texts find a source of empowerment and healing in traditional folk healing practices of their communities. I delineate the way that Petry and Cofer expose how educational, legal, and religious institutions fail immigrants and migrants. I provide a brief political, economic, and historical background that facilitates an understanding of the authors' authentic representations of the hostile and challenging urban landscapes encountered by the newcomers. This includes a brief discussion of the Great Migration and the economic transformations in Puerto Rico that prompted a surge of immigration to the northern United States. My research of the authors makes very clear their commitment to their work as political protest and their own personal experience of racism and oppression.

Chapter four moves beyond the borders of national origin to consider Krauss and Perez's use of the photograph as authors of the literature of exile. Through the Hirschian lens of postmemory, their common identity forming strategies of knowing and creating pasts becomes evident. I provide a brief biography of the authors that makes quite explicit their sometimes reluctant desire to know, if only creatively, their pasts. Pérez confirms that, in her estimation, Dominicans are "perpetually looking back" to their homeland. Similarly, Krauss points to a sense of loss of histories that can never be recovered due to the Holocaust and reveals that she is always living with this double

sense of knowing and not knowing. My research about the authors confirms that, like many, they do not want to be pigeon-holed or categorized but prefer that their work be considered for its universal themes. However, I assert their common concerns as inheritors of historic political upheaval and tragedy.

This chapter explores the various uses of the photograph and their effects of creating spaces of knowing: Leo Gursky learns about the death of his son, Alma unravels the mystery about whom she is named after and who is “courting” her mother, Zvi Litvinoff is informed about his sister. Therefore, we see that the photograph has memorial and informational purposes. Furthermore, I demonstrate Pérez’s dismantling of the traditionally myth-making family portrait and her use of the photograph to facilitate the character’s knowing the past.

A fundamental premise of this project is that, despite national origin, race, or motivating factor for leaving one’s homeland, literary portrayals of exile share remarkably similar elements. I analyze the pronounced incidence of violence, the use of traditional folk healing practices and *Santería*, and postmemorial strategies, particularly the photograph, in the literature of exile, migration, and immigration. I argue that the incidence of violence reflects broader national and domestic political concerns, that folk healing and *Santería* provide a source of cultural healing, and that second- and third-generation exiles similarly employ postmemorial strategies. This three-tiered analysis reveals a community of exile portrayed by woman authors that I hope will encourage further inclusive cross-cultural discussion.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The terms referring to Caribbean and African American folk healing faiths, practices, and traditions are defined further in chapter three. Generally, *Santería*, Spiritism, and Hoodoo refer to practices originating in Europe and Africa that continue to be used by communities in the United States. I highlight the portrayals of these practices in *The Line of the Sun* and *The Street*.

<sup>2</sup> Simone A. Aguiar does provide a recent comparative essay concerning traumatic representations in both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Geographies of Home* in *Trauma Narratives and Herstory* in which he compares and contrasts the characters' traumatic experiences and their effect on subjectivity.

## CHAPTER II

### REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA: GARCÍA, SANTIAGO, PÉREZ

...I never made it to Cuba to see Abuela Celia. After that, I felt like my destiny was not my own, that men who had nothing to do with me had the power to rupture my dreams...

—*Dreaming in Cuban*

As authors of literature of exile and immigration, Cristina García, Esmeralda Santiago, and Loida Maritza Pérez narrate tales that reflect the pain and trauma of rupture from one's homeland. I will be discussing the common thread of various forms of domestic violence that runs through these three texts, portraying a preponderance of violence that figures as fulcrums of wounding and displacement. I propose that these various forms of violence and the resulting display of trauma reflect a common process of "working through"—a process that is addressed by Dominick LaCapra and E. Ann Kaplan in their discussions of trauma, and to which I will turn shortly. I wish to explore a sampling of instances and episodes that document this abundance of violence. In García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, a repeated narration of an incident of domestic violence involving a chair reflects the hallmark indicator of trauma—repetition. The alignment of the incident with broader global issues makes it useful to consider, and García's repeated inclusion of this event highlights its significance. All three authors also address the trauma of rape: rape committed by soldiers, by a longtime partner, and also incestuous rape. Finally, I will delineate the frequent violence that occurs between mothers and

daughters. Their fraught relationships depict a legacy of survivorship. Lourdes, América, and Aurelia try desperately, and with physical emphasis, to pass the lesson of how to survive on to their daughters. The relationships between family members, and particularly between mothers and daughters, figure prominently in these texts.

### Rape and Domestic Violence

First, I want to point out the numerous instances of violence, including those repeated several times throughout *Dreaming in Cuban*. I propose that these repetitions in the text indicate the substantial presence of trauma in García's work in which she portrays a family fragmented by communism and exile. Celia is the matriarch of the family and staunch supporter of Fidel Castro. Her eldest daughter Lourdes, critic of communism, has settled with her family in Brooklyn. Felicia is her only child remaining on the island, and is tormented and traumatized by her violent husband. At the start of the novel, her only son Javier has moved abroad with his family. Thus, this fragmented family could be seen to accurately reflect the actual state of dispersal of the Cuban people and their polarized views. Close readings of instances of domestic violence that are prevalent and intergenerational include one mentioned at the onset of Felicia's father violently thrashing his son-in-law with a chair. Furthermore, even the absence of this chair becomes a constant presence/indicator of family discord, loss, and upheaval. Within the first couple of pages of the novel, the chair incident is presented, with its various connotations: "Only seven chairs remain of the set. Her husband smashed one on the back of Hugo Villaverde, their former son-in-law, and could not repair it for all the splinters" (4). One notes the ironic omnipresence of the absence of the chair indicated by

the fact that “only seven remain.” In these lines in the initial pages, the reader learns that much in the family itself may be beyond repair. Celia’s husband could not repair the chair as it was so splintered. Later in the novel when Celia is caring for her daughter Felicia’s twins, she again notes that she “fears their recollections—the smashed chairs that left splinters in their feet, the obscenities that hung like electric insects in the air” (46-47). The physical objects—splinters—are literally aligned with the verbal assault, “the obscenities that hung like electric insects in the air” (47). The breaking apart of these chairs works in tandem with the breaking apart of the world and of the del Pino family. The breaking apart is at the object level—the chair, the family, and only a page later Celia wonders about the breaking apart of continents in one of her husband’s readings:

About how, long ago, the New World was attached to Europe and Africa? Yes, and the continents pulled away slowly, painfully after millions of years. The Americas are still inching westward and will eventually collide with Japan. Celia wonders whether Cuba will be left behind, alone in the Caribbean Sea with its faulted and folded mountains, its conquests, its memories. (48)

García, of course is alluding to a time of worldwide conflict by her mention of Japan, conflict that is reflected here by the del Pino family. As well, Celia will mourn the breaking apart and dispersal of her family—her daughter Felicia because of her mental problems, and her other children geographically and politically.

A third time the chair episode is brought into the story, this time in detail. Jorge del Pino had warned his son-in-law not to come into the family home. Defying him, Hugo comes in haughtily making himself at home, and Jorge attacks him: “The heat of

his breath clouded his round glasses. Without a word, he lifted a dining-room chair and swung it in a wide arc against the back of his son-in-law. The fragments exploded across the room as if a gigantic tree had been sloppily felled” (90). Hugo responds with a punch to Jorge’s face. Certainly, the repetition of this episode highlights the breakdown of the family and traditions of behavior that would be expected in Cuban society, especially during this time period. García seems to be emphasizing the overall breakdown of not only the del Pino family, but also of tradition through this repeated portrayal.

Another significant manifestation of trauma in several of the works I am looking at here is the consistent inclusion of rape. Cristina García, Esmeralda Santiago, and Loida Maritza Pérez portray the oppression and resulting trauma of rape. Of course, rape is generally recognized to be a form of violent oppression or dominance that I suggest the authors use to suggest broader national dominance and control. Latina authors consistently refer to Spain’s domination of native inhabitants of the islands, the domination of slaves, by colonizers, the domination by Trujillo, Castro, the American government, etc. In both *Dreaming* and *América’s Dream* the perpetrators of rape and other forms of violence are the “significant others,” who should be the most trusted individuals, highlighting the unreliability of those in positions of power, for whatever reason, whether simply physical or political. Thus, the individual instances of rape are symbolic of broader dominations and aggressions. Thompson and Gunne, in their collection of essays, critique attempts to “equate[s] the violated land to the violated woman” (2). However, I will point out the continual alignment of these violations to the land, such as Coreá’s position as a guard for the U.S. installation in Vieques, Santiago’s



foregrounding of the island's idyllic nature, and the rape of Lourdes by soldiers. Ana Menéndez, in her 2009 interview with Celeste Fraser Delgado about her most recent book *The Last War*, discusses the idea of national allegory in which couples are symbolic of the founding of the nation. Delgado points out the aspect within national allegory in which "the personal transmits the national." Menéndez enthusiastically endorses this interpretation and adds—of special interest here—that indeed "the macro is represented in the micro" and that violent leadership teaches "narratives of violence" that influence how family members relate to each other. Her comments certainly reveal how authors choose to portray significant historical events through the immediacy of family. I assert that the preponderance of violence I am delineating reflects both national and individual concerns.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, there is more than one instance of assault. When Lourdes stands up to soldiers in Cuba, their revenge is violent. Not only does the soldier rape Lourdes, but he also permanently inscribes the event on Lourdes's body: "When he finished, the soldier lifted the knife and began to scratch at Lourdes's belly with great concentration. A primeval scraping. Crimson hieroglyphics. The pain brought a flood of color back to Lourdes's eyes. She saw the blood seep from her skin like rainwater from a sodden earth" (72). The concrete physical scars, evocative of Toni Morrison's Sethe's branchlike scars, are lifelong outward evidence of the trauma that Lourdes has experienced. In the way that Morrison forever inscribes injustices of the past on the social consciousness through the vivid imagery of the physical scars, similarly García paints a vivid and unforgettable portrait of the cruelty of Castro's soldiers, giving voice to

those who suffered during the revolution. Later, Lourdes, like Marina in *Geographies of Home*, attempts to scrub away the violation: “Not until later...after she had scoured her skin and hair with detergents meant for the walls and the tile floors, after stanching the blood with cotton and gauze and wiping the steam from the bathroom mirror, did Lourdes try to read what he had carved. But it was illegible” (72). Of course it is illegible. No logical meaning can be made from this violent inscription. Furthermore, the inscription’s illegibility asserts a feminist resistance—the soldier’s hieroglyphics are unreadable. Sorchá Gunne, in her discussion of post-apartheid writing, suggests that “interrogating sexual violence is fundamental to the fabric of negotiating the past as it exemplifies the moment where the dominating body attempts to write itself onto the body of the dominated” (165). Certainly, this is graphically done in this instance of a soldier violating Lourdes’s body.

Fatima Mujcinovic offers several compelling points with regard to García’s depiction of Lourdes. First, she points out that Lourdes’s insatiable desire for sex and compulsive eating are “symptoms of the sexual abuse that Lourdes experienced during Cuba’s revolutionary days” and are a sign of post-traumatic stress disorder (175). She argues that this depiction provides a contrasting portrayal to other exile narratives because “the author conveys that the intensity of the trauma and betrayal drives this character to alienate herself completely from the space of home(land) and embrace exile as a space where she can recuperate her obliterated self” (175). Mujcinovic asserts that “The association of the rape with her homeland, rather than with political patriarchy, drives Lourdes into an exilic absence” (176). However, I would suggest that the rape is

inextricably linked to Garcia's depiction of political patriarchy and serves to graphically demonstrate its violation.

In *America's Dream*, Esmeralda Santiago portrays a household of women on the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, where a U.S. military base is located. The family comes from a long line of women who have been housekeepers at a resort. Ester, América, and Rosalinda demonstrate how, unfortunately, history repeats itself; Ester and América both became teenage moms and ran away from home. América is the one who will break the tradition of subservience for herself and her daughter and overcome her abusive partner Correa, his continuous beatings, and eventual assault. One evening when she is caring for the children of tourists staying at the hotel where she works, a drunken Correa arrives to have his way with América. She has hoped that he would change, but when he shows up she knows that "it is the old Correa, the one she fears, not the one of her domestic dream" (108). Despite the fact that the two young children she is caring for are close by, he assaults her: "She can't fight him. His breath comes in hot, rum-scented blasts, and still he bites her cheeks, her neck, her breasts, and bares her lower body....She'd bite him back but doesn't want him to think she's enjoying this...the taking of América whenever and however he wants her" (109). Because of his physical strength, Correa can overwhelm her. Santiago continuously emphasizes the landscape of Vieques, an island off the coast of Puerto Rico that has a U.S. military installation. In this way, she continually aligns the action of the characters with the political concerns of the country. The corruption of the island by the domination of the United States is reflected in Correa's domination of América, and is made clear by the words following the assault:

“She prays as Correa rides. Prays to Jesus protector of children, that He keep their eyes shut and their ears deaf to everything but the coquí singing outside the window, its shrill song more like a scream than a melody” (109). All innocence has been corrupted by this violent domination. There is the risk highlighted here that the children will witness this. América has been violated, and Santiago aligns this immediately with the island itself when she points out that even the song of the iconic coquí, a symbol of Puerto Rico’s beauty and heritage, has been turned into a “shrill song more like a scream.”

Similarly, the pages of Loida Maritza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* are replete with all manner of violence. Pérez explores the dynamics of a large Dominican family in extreme turmoil. Aurelia and Papito expose the difficult immigrant journey from poverty in their homeland to the challenges of an alien landscape. Their economic progress is marginal, and their adult children battle domestic discord and violence. Iliana is their college freshman who returns home, wanting to help but battered by her father’s fanatic religious views, her sister Marina’s psychotic episodes, and the conflict between the call of home and the desire to be an independent college student. Domestic violence is graphic and startling in this exilic text. The violence occurs in a variety of familial permutations. Part of Marina’s mental instability is expressed by her assertion that her sister Iliana is secretly a man. While out with Iliana and her friend Ed, Marina

recalled having heard of children born in the Dominican Republic with both male and female organs. In such cases the penis had been snipped off to render the child a girl. However it was obvious to her that other sexually confounding and harder-to-detect birth defects could occur. Of those she had considered, the most insidious was the possibility that a child could be born with male organs tucked inside. If such was the case with Iliana....It would also account for why her

parents, sensing that she was different, allowed her more freedom than they had granted the other girls. (277)

The reader is made keenly aware of Marina's suspicions, and Pérez creates an atmosphere of high tension as one awaits what Marina will do next. In Marina's justification of why the parents allow Iliana "more freedom than they had granted the other girls," Pérez is also foregrounding the societal limits placed on women in her culture. Marina brutally attacks Iliana and, making the excuse that she's cold, asks Iliana to let her get in bed with her. Iliana considers her own fears to be illogical, but attributes them to her own experience of being raped at school by a drunk student who had stalked her. Iliana considers "On that occasion the source of her danger had been conspicuous. But it was no stranger standing before her now. It was her sister, whom she was meant to trust..." (one notes yet another incidence of rape, although not detailed, Iliana has also been the victim of rape) (282). Again the violator is someone who is meant to be trusted, as in the case of Pasi3n, Corea in *Am3rica's Dream*, and Hugo in *Dreaming in Cuban*. It would seem that an attack by one's own sister would be an even greater breach of trust, as this familial relationship is traditionally thought to be among the closest.

I want to turn, again, to an instance of domestic violence in which the husband is the perpetrator. Rebecca is the daughter in *Geographies*' large Dominican family who symbolizes the trailblazer; she is the one who comes first to the new land, paving the way for others to follow. She dreams of material success and all of the joys of the American Dream. Thinking she has accomplished her goals by marrying Pasi3n, she goes with him believing all of his promises of a beautiful home only to find deception: "Mute with

shock, Rebecca had followed him through a corridor lined with stained and gutted mattresses” (55). This is just a hint of what her life will be like with Pasión. His violence is relentless. Pasión wakes Rebecca up with cold water, slaps her then he “seized her by the hair. He hauled her across the room and slammed her face against a wall. Blood spurted from her nose, splattering the wall and trickling onto the floor. He twisted her arm behind her back. Her hands clenched into ineffectual fists. He forced one of them to unfurl and systematically bent its fingers until their bones were heard to snap” (168). One notes here the graphic and shocking nature of the violence, and the stark contrast between what Rebecca hoped her American life would be, “She had honestly believed that she would be able to pick gold off the streets and send for her parents so they might live as grandly as those who returned to the Dominican Republic claimed was possible,” (59) and what her life actually is.

Marina, Rebecca’s sister, has also experienced rape, and appears to be traumatized by her experiences, resulting in hallucinations and paranoia. The reader is never certain of when the rape takes place, or who rapes Marina. Her confusion is highlighted by the reader’s lack of reliable facts or claims. At one point, she accuses her brother Tico of rape. Hoping to wash away the memories of rape, she attempts a cleansing similar to América’s that I have mentioned previously:

Filled with self-loathing, Marina turned on the hot water in the shower. When its steam obliterated her image in the mirror, she collected a razor, a can of Lysol, several Brillo pads from under the sink, and stepped into the stall...Determined to rid herself of the odor and to reclaim her defiled body, she reached soapy fingers into the folds between her legs. Wincing, she worked the lather into her inner walls, then shaved her pubic hairs as well as those under her arms....She meticulously scoured herself with Brillo,...when her skin blistered and she could

stand the pain no more, she stepped from the stall and sprayed herself with Lysol.  
(18-19)

This description of cleansing, verging on self-mutilation, makes graphic the trauma that Marina has experienced and the lengths to which she will go to eliminate it from her life. Both Marina and América attempt to scour away the effects of these assaults.

As previously mentioned, the idea of conflating the woman's body with the colonized territory is debated and can be problematic. For example, Thompson and Gunne note in their introduction: "His [Seamus Heaney] use of the eponymous symbolism that equates the violation of women's bodies with the rape of land and culture has been challenged by feminists for perpetuating the view of women's bodies as a resource, property or guarded secret belonging to men" (2). However, even within the same collection of essays, indeed noted within the introduction, Moniza Alvi claims, "...for me politics and sexual violence, were, via trauma, inextricably linked" (xiii). Similarly, Alison Van Nyhuis explains that "América's abusive romantic relationship with Correa alludes to the uneven distribution of power in Puerto Rico's political relationship with Spain and America, and therefore, gestures towards the intimate relationship between romance and nation" (1). The emphasis on rape and other forms of physical violence serves to further feminist concerns in various ways. In her discussion of Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, Robin E. Field asserts that "The episodes of sexual violence within *The House on Mango Street* further this emergent trend in American literature of first portraying rape sensitively and then connecting this violence with the hegemonic power structures that promoted gender oppression" (56).

Furthermore, Field contends that “Cisneros deliberately uses incidents of rape and gender violence in the novel not only to expose the existence of this abuse, but also to challenge the limitations set upon female identity and mobility in the Chicano community” (56).

Although Mardorossian is arguing that contemporary Caribbean authors are not employing rape in their narratives, which as seen in this present work is debatable, she mentions that “Rape had been such a consistent trope of oppression since the second wave, it has so often been used as a metaphor for colonial relations in literature that it may be too clichéd a trope for a new generation of migrant Caribbean writers...” (24). I would argue that the portrayals of violence I have outlined do participate in a critique of hegemonic practices. I would also add that it is important to consider the range of violence discussed here in order to recognize that rape, to borrow a phrase from Lisa Fitzpatrick’s essay “Signifying Rape,” is “one element in a spectrum of violence and cruelty” (194). Therefore, the portrayals of violence address a variety of issues: the incidence of violence in women’s lives, their representations of a wide array of violence, the broader political implications, and, ironically, offer spectacular modes of resistance and survivorship. Furthermore, Fiona McCann points out in her essay “Writing Rape” that by examination of this issue authors “tackle the subject of rape and torture with a view to pinpointing the impact of colonial and patriarchal structures on women’s lives” and “to emphasize the forgotten voices....fiction becomes a privileged space that draws attention to these forgotten or unacknowledged stories of rape” (86-87). Fitzpatrick contends in her discussion of drama, “rape may function as one of many violations within the nihilistic universe that Kane created in her work, where it is an extreme form of



cruelty that evokes a physical recoil in the audience. Within women's writing, the representation of rape may be most subversive when it does not destroy the victim" (196). Thus, both McCann and Fitzpatrick counter sentimental responses or interpretations of these narratives of rape and violence, and instead highlight the emancipatory and resistant nature of these discourses.

In her work *Worlds of Hurt*, Kalí Tal extensively addresses literary representations of trauma, including rape. She discusses the pervasiveness of violence and trauma in women's lives and wants readers "to acknowledge the existence of an ongoing campaign of sexual violence and oppression waged by many men against the women and children of the United States" (4). I propose that her analysis of rape is pertinent here because the women authors in this study similarly choose to highlight the prevalence of violence in women's lives, and in this case, the violence is inextricably linked to other forms of political oppression: dictatorships in Cuba and the Dominican Republic and imperialistic practices in the case of Puerto Rico. Tal asserts that "the American woman lives in fear of an enemy who stalks her today [unlike fears that are relegated to specific times of war]" (20).

Certainly, the protagonists in *Dreaming*, *América's Dream*, and *Geographies* offer this subversive representation that Fitzpatrick is referring to as Lourdes, América, Marina (in her own schizophrenic way), and Iliana not only survive, but go on to have their own business, provide the opportunity for a better life for their children, or get an education. García, Santiago, and Pérez's narrations depict women who ultimately are able to choose and make their own way, despite the many obstacles. These texts assert

that for the women contained in these pages there are virtually no safe spaces. Some of the conflicts arise from the hegemonic practices of men—Hugo, Correa, Pasión—and nations—in particular U.S. imperialistic practices in Puerto Rico, Trujillo, and Castro. But, interestingly, the incidences that are narrated in our texts at hand point to a high degree of survivorship.

I suggest that the preponderance of these violent episodes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, *América's Dream*, and *Geographies of Home* indicates a kind of manifestation and representation of the trauma of leaving one's homeland and its related and precipitating incidences and indicates their participation in a collective process of "working through." LaCapra and Kaplan both confirm this aspect of "working through" (LaCapra 2001).

Kaplan is discussing responses to the attacks of 9/11 claiming:

I show the increasing importance of 'translating' trauma—that is, of finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as to oneself.... Trauma can never be 'healed in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being 'translated' via art. (19)

There are several points of interest here. Kaplan affirms my suggestion that art, in my view whether it be fiction, painting, or music, may be a response not only to one's own experience, but also the experience of others. At first this may seem an obvious point, but I think it is important to recognize the intimate association, for these authors, of their own known experience and memories, and that of experience narrated by family members. Tal similarly contends the importance of author experience and the idea of working through: "Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story

of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (21). Laurie Vickroy would also concur. She asserts that trauma writers use their art as a way to “express and, to some extent, overcome trauma (110).”<sup>1</sup> The line between one’s own experience and that of others, in these cases, is particularly slim. All of the authors of the works I am examining here have personal experience of exile and immigration. Cristina García and Loida Maritza Pérez have experienced, or certainly would have personal knowledge of the traumatic experiences of others under oppressive regimes. Also, the idea of “working through” that Kaplan emphasizes in her text is evident in these texts by the continual high tension between the homeland and the U.S. that is emphasized by the fragmented nature of *Geographies* and *Dreaming* in which the narrator is frequently changing, and the constant backward glance, such as América’s constant concern and communication with family members in Puerto Rico, does not allow the reader to ever forget this “working through” process.

### Mothers and Daughters

*Dreaming in Cuban*, *América’s Dream*, and *Geographies of Home* all foreground familial relationships, and in particular, mother-daughter relationships. Cristina García, in her interview with Bridget Kevane and Juanita Heredia, explains that she is “fascinated with the mother-daughter relationship.... [and that] the mother-daughter relationship is the primal relationship on the planet” (82). She also discusses some of her goals in an interview with Scott Shibuya Brown: “I wanted to highlight not only generational differences between my characters but also the differences that were compounded by

contrasting perspectives of the Cuban revolution. The generation gap was not only familial, but political, and it made ordinary rites of rebellion more complex and fraught with tension” (1993). Again, here one sees that for these authors the familial and political are inseparable. The women authors of these texts portray extremely fraught interactions between mothers and daughters, and I propose that one might consider several key factors for such portrayals.<sup>2</sup> The themes of survivorship, control, generational concerns, and the notion of familial interactions being a microcosm of more general political concerns that I will discuss in more detail, all play a part in these exilic narrations. Marianne Hirsch addresses several of these topics in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*. Hirsch notes:

Female plots, as many feminist critics have demonstrated, act out the frustrations engendered by these limited possibilities and attempt to subvert the constraint of dominant patterns by means of various ‘emancipatory strategies’—the revision of endings, beginnings, patterns of progression....the writers I study here are not only women writers marked biographically, by their biology and psychology, but feminists writers who define themselves by their dissenting relation to dominant tradition. (8)

Certainly, the three texts we are looking at here enact the subversion and dissent that Hirsch points out. Also, one could align her “act[ing] out the frustrations,” with the previously mentioned “working through” of LaCapra and Kaplan.

When looking at these texts, one notes an uncanny consistency of violence between mothers and daughters. In *Dreaming* there are several instances when Lourdes is violent towards Pilar. Pilar explains that Lourdes reads her diary: “That’s how she knows about me in the tub. I like to lie on my back and let the shower rain down on me

full force. If I move my hips to just the right position, it feels great, like little explosions on a string” (27). When her mother reads this Pilar explains that “she beat me in the face and pulled my hair out in big clumps. She called me a *desgraciada* and ground her knuckles into my temples” (27). Later in the text, Lourdes slaps Pilar for what she considers to be a disrespectful remark. In this instance she has made an off-hand remark about Armstrong’s “first words on the moon,” but interestingly Lourdes notes that “it made no difference to her .... Pilar was immune to threats. She placed no value on normal things so it was impossible to punish her. Even now, Pilar is not afraid of pain or of losing anything.” (128). Is this evidence of the ability to survive that Lourdes has unwittingly passed on to her daughter? Pilar has lost her homeland, and specifically, feels the loss of her grandmother whom she so desperately tries to run away to.

Within the first few chapters of *América’s Dream*, one sees violent interactions between the mother and daughter. Santiago portrays a family of women with difficult relationships and with a legacy of running away from home when young. América, like her mother before her was a teenage mother who leaves home. Now, América’s daughter Rosalinda is about to do the same. Rosalinda accuses her mother of only caring about what the neighbors will think. The two get into an argument, and when América insists that Rosalinda owes her an explanation, she tells her mom, “I don’t owe you anything!” (43). At that point América confirms that she “can’t stop her hand once it begins its arc toward her daughter’s face, once it slaps her full in the mouth, the sound flat against her daughter’s echoing scream. After the first slap....América climbs up after her, punches her against the corner where the wall and bed meet” (43). América cannot control her

rage or her desperate attempt to prevent Rosalinda from making the same mistakes she made.

In *Geographies*, Iliana remembers a childhood episode in which she tries to come to her mother's defense. A neighbor had been asking Aurelia about the family Christmas plans and was detailing the great gifts she had gotten her children. Iliana feels compelled to rise to her mother's defense as she detects her mother's frustration at not being able to provide the kind of Christmas for her family that Myra will be able to provide her children. Caught up in her childish thoughts of revenge, Iliana is suddenly "roused only by Aurelia dragging her downstairs. When they reached their apartment, Aurelia raised a hand and fiercely struck Iliana's face. 'Take that,' she spit, as her youngest daughter reeled from the impact of the single blow" (180). Embarrassed by Iliana's impertinence in front of the neighbor, and also by the fact that Iliana's reaction most likely allowed the neighbor to guess at the family's poverty, Aurelia strikes out at her youngest. This leads Iliana to discover the rage within herself that I will discuss later and again demonstrates a legacy of violence passed down from mother to daughter.

After Aurelia and Papito rescue Rebecca and her children from their hellish life with Pasión, Rebecca still recovering from one of his beatings, Aurelia performs one of her own sorts of violations against Rebecca. She notices that Rebecca's children are hiding food away for later even though they have plenty at their grandmother's house. Memories of her own suffering and hunger in the Dominican Republic (208) [note the immediacy of memories of the homeland] fuel her retaliation against Rebecca for what her mother considers to be a lack of responsible motherly behavior toward the children:

Any compassion Aurelia might have felt for her eldest daughter dissipated as she thought of the food she had found hidden throughout the house. Seething, she stood up from the bed and stepped into the basement bathroom. Locating what she needed in a cabinet, she returned to her daughter's side, hauled her up by the hair, reached into a pocket for the pair of scissors she had gone to fetch. She then fiercely snipped off a clump of the hair this daughter would have made sure to wash and straighten in anticipation of returning to Pasi3n. (214-215)

Aurelia's ferocity is emphasized in this passage with P3rez's use of the words "seething," "hauled," and "fiercely." Her actions are punitive and meant to prevent Rebecca from considering a return to her assailant. It is interesting to note this kind of dehumanizing act that at the same time erases Rebecca's sexuality as she would have "made sure to wash and straighten" it to make herself attractive to Pasi3n. This preventive, protective, and punitive act is evocative of other historic instances in which the individual is stripped of his or her identity to make them conform to a new way of being; in this case, it is Aurelia who is chiseling her daughter into who she wants her to be.<sup>3</sup>

In "Rape by Proxy," Mardorossian's characterization, although discussing Haitian maternal practices in which the mother tests the daughter's state of virginity, is useful for describing the types of relationships discussed here as "blurring the distinction between maternal nurture and torture" (*Feminism* 29). Yet, while the mothers here appear to enact a cruel form of "nurture," I would again turn to Hirsch's keen explication of portrayals of the mother/daughter relationship in light of authorial strategies when deciphering these puzzling relationships. Hirsch explains, "maternal discourse is intimately tied to and tied up in social and political reality, as well as to biological and psychological structures," (196) also (in the context of her discussion of *Beloved*), "When Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through

generations of mothers who could have no control over their children's lives, no voice in their upbringing" (197). Similarly, when examining these violent mother/daughter relationships, one must think about a complex array of political and social sources to unravel the mystery behind the portrayals of violence, the recurrent slaps that seem to punctuate societal limits—female sexual pleasure and freedom in the case of Lourdes and Pilar or América and Rosalind, and the social mores of privacy and shame of poverty in the case of Aurelia and Iliana. Pérez unveils the myth of the American Dream through her portrayal of Rebecca's chronic "addictions" of sorts—her illusive search for the gold covered streets or gentle caretaker—when Aurelia enacts the ritual cutting of the hair. All of these "acts of war," in a sense, would already need to be fought within the traditional cultural limitations of the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, but are now driven to code red by the further marginalization of exile and migration. Perhaps this is why García literally turns Aurelia and Lourdes into soldiers. Aurelia has the job of watching for invading Americans from her oceanside home, and Lourdes, like her mother, becomes a kind of soldier herself "walking her beat" to keep the neighborhood safe (127). These women must remain constantly vigilant of surrounding dangers and potential invasions. Lourdes explains it as a necessity for women to "protect what was theirs" (128).



### Mental Illness and Suicide

In addition to the instances of violence, including rape and other forms of physical violence, one notes numerous references to mental illness and attempted suicide in all three of these texts. Iliana, one of the central characters in *Geographies*, the one who is the most independent, and the one who goes to college, also has her violent acts and obsessions. When Aurelia slaps Iliana, she unleashes the violence within her. Aurelia's unreasonable punishment provokes Iliana to reveal to the neighbor children that Santa Claus is a lie the grownups tell. Myra reveals this to Iliana's parents who make her go back and "unreveal" the Christmas myth. The neighbors represent all that Iliana's family does not have, all of the undelivered promises of the American Dream: money, enough for the children to each have their own room, a nice apartment with a couch "soft and bare of the thick plastic that creaked and stuck to her legs if she sat on it for long," and books. Their lifestyle "encourage[d] Pepe and Lily to read instead of watch TV" (183). Although the parents were Puerto Rican, they were able to speak English "with no trace of a Spanish accent" (183). Indeed, this family represents all that Iliana's family does not have.

Iliana's resentment builds as she comes to think that her parents have favored her siblings with gifts she does not receive, and her awareness of the hypocrisy of their religious beliefs in light of "the beatings they administered for any infraction ranging from accidentally shattering a glass to speaking with a defiant tone" (185). When Iliana's parents try to make amends with her by giving her a doll at Christmas, not the one that she had requested, her own resentment and violence is unleashed:

Her rage at discovering that faith lacked the power to make her dreams come true and her resentment toward the parents who had taught her to believe, if not in Santa, then at least in God, lent her the strength to tear out every strand of Hi Dottie's blond and silken hair. She then snatched off the doll's clothes and ripped them between her teeth. Still not satisfied, she smashed its skull against a wall and did the same thing with its phone. Last of all, she shredded the box the doll had come in. (188)

In this episode we can see a kind of reenactment of the sorts of violent experiences the women have had to endure; however, rather than feel empowered by her violent behavior, Iliana "was struck by the magnitude of what she'd done" (188). She was horrified to find that "lurking under her skin was a rage like her mother's when she'd slapped her: like her father's whenever he lost his patience.... This same monster which Iliana had often glimpsed through the eyes of those whose souls it had possessed now make its presence known within her own" (189). As a result, she develops "a myriad of neuroses" and determines to always be completely controlled and "fair in all she did" (189). She identifies with the violent rage she has seen in her parents and this terrifies her.

In one episode of *Geographies*, when Marina is kicked out of a church service because she claims to see God, she goes home and attempts suicide thinking, "[s]he had no idea how to go about selecting which of the vials' contents to ingest. In the past she had slit her wrists or swallowed aspirins. But this time she wanted something potent enough to leave her dead, not merely weak or retching" (117). It is obvious from this passage that Marina has attempted suicide various times and that this time she is determined to succeed in her attempt.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* Felicia also attempts suicide. After incidences of violence where immediately after her marriage Hugo threatens to kill Felicia (81), her mental state deteriorates. García intertwines Felicia's sufferings with those of other women across the globe: "lost children, for the prostitutes in India, for the women raped in Havana last night. Their faces stare at her, plaintive, uncomplaining" (82). Ivanito, Felicia's son, becomes her ally in the struggle against the world's injustices, and she attempts to instruct him in the art of survival. Felicia claims, "[i]magination, like memory, can transform lies to truths" (88). She also suggests to Ivanito that he "must imagine winter....Winter and its white extinguishings" (88). Winter, of course, alluding to New York where her sister and her family live and where her father has gone seeking medical attention, but instead he has died there. Felicia "crushes pink tablets on the last of their ice cream....carries her son upstairs and gently places him on the fresh sheets....Then she crosses her hands over her breasts and they sleep" (89). Here again, suicide becomes the antidote of choice for the overwhelming difficulties and challenges, a kind of escape. Marina and Felicia attain an empowering sense of freedom as they control their destinies through these acts of attempted suicide.

Both matriarchs in *Dreaming* and *Geographies* combat mental breakdowns. After the birth of her first daughter Lourdes, Celia "talked about how the baby had no shadow, how the earth in its hunger had consumed it. She held their child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name'" (43). Not remembering her name is repeated twice more in the novel. The ghost of Jorge explains to his daughter Lourdes that he knew that the experience of leaving Celia with his mother and sister after the birth

of his daughter would break her, and that after he returned, she had held her baby out “by one leg and told [him] she would not remember your name” (195). He explains that after that: “I left her in an asylum. I told the doctors to make her forget. They used electricity. They fed her pills” (195). So the preponderance of mental illness one notes with Felicia’s attempted suicide and Celia’s breakdown is significant in García’s text.

Pérez also portrays a matriarch who had spent time in an asylum. Early in the novel, Aurelia remembers the hardships of coming to a new country and the process of renovating a dilapidated and rat infested house. She also recalls that it was only the thought of leaving her children motherless that gave her the strength to recover:

Everything had seemed grim and violent: the faces encountered on New York streets; the dirty snow hardened into ice and stained with blood where someone had been wounded....Terrified to step outside and claustrophobic in the three-room apartment shared with Papito and their children, she had deteriorated to a skeletal eighty-one pounds....But although she had recovered, she had emerged from a nine-month hospital stay profoundly changed. Gone were her confidence and self-respect. How could she trust herself when she had willingly brought herself to the brink of death? (24)

These few lines can be considered to encapsulate the stark realities of immigration—the realities of poor, crowded living conditions and the loss of loved ones left behind. The cold dirty snow reflective of the cold harsh life in a new place, the blood-stained snow indicative of the emotional wounds experienced by the immigrant, and the enormous will, both to die and then recover, are portrayed here.

### Survival

Both García and Pérez appear to take their matriarchs to the brink of disaster, but instead narrate stories in which Aurelia and Celia make the conscious choice to survive. I think that Cathy Caruth's discussion of Freud's theories of trauma and historical violence can be useful for an understanding of how, ultimately, García, Santiago, and Pérez bring us stories of survival, and elucidates the fact that these texts are unified by this aspect of survivorship. Caruth claims that a reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism* "represent Freud's theory of trauma and historical violence" and that "read together, represent Freud's formulation of trauma as a theory of peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival" (58).<sup>4</sup> She goes on to assert that only by reading "the theory of individual trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in the context of the notion of historical trauma in *Moses and Monotheism* that we can understand the full complexity of the problem of survival at the heart of human experience" (58). I propose that the violence and traumatic ruptures from their homelands that the stories of exile, immigration, and migration that I am exploring here similarly demonstrate this "problem of survival at the heart of human experience" that Caruth refers to.

Caruth asserts that "[t]he belated experience of trauma in Jewish monotheism suggests that history is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" (71). As readers, we witness this multigenerational survival in the stories of Aurelia, Rebecca, Marina, Celia, Lourdes, Felicia, and América. These tales encompass vast histories of domination and imperialism by dictators, by nations, by

husbands and lovers that are tales beyond the scope of any single individual, family, or text. These narrations portray the “working through” that LaCapra speaks of.

Indeed, the notion of survival is explicitly explored throughout *Dreaming in Cuban*. As a second generation immigrant to the United States, Pilar has an overwhelming desire to return to Cuba and to her Grandmother. García endows this character with an uncanny memory of everything that has happened, even as an infant. Ground zero of the rupture from Pilar’s homeland is her grandmother’s lap from which her mother Lourdes pulls her: “Mom tried to pull me away but I clung to Abuela and screamed at the top of my lungs” (26). I suggest that García endows Pilar with memories that will not allow future generations to forget, either. Pilar thinks about the fact that her mother has made clear delineations between right and wrong, and adheres to political ideologies which are “black-and-white” and “how she survives” (26). For Lourdes, having very clear notions of right and wrong ways of thinking aids her survival. In this way she is able to justify bringing her daughter to the U.S., away from her grandmother, claiming “Abuela Celia’s had plenty of chances to leave Cuba but that she’s stubborn and got her head turned around by El Líder” (26). However, García dispels any Lourdes-like binaries of right and wrong thinking. In a letter to Gustavo, Celia remembers the disparity between rich and poor before the revolution and the “beggar families from the countryside looking for work in the iron-fenced mansions of Vedado” (98).

Celia is a survivor. She survives losing the love of her life, Gustavo, the mistreatment of her by her mother and sister-in-law that ends up sending her to an asylum, a tidal wave, and a revolution. When Celia finds out she’s pregnant, she decides

that if she has a boy she will go to Spain, but that if she has a girl “She would not abandon a daughter to this life, but train her to read the columns of blood and numbers in men’s eyes, to understand the morphology of survival. Her daughter, too, would outlast the hard flames” (42). Again, one notes here the allusion to blood and wounding.<sup>5</sup> I especially want to emphasize her determination to teach a future daughter how to survive, “the morphology of survival,” the language and method of survival. In this passage Celia affirms that she is a survivor, and that her survival has been forged through great hardships, as her future daughter will have to be able to do. Thus, García portrays a legacy of survivorship that starts with Celia, is passed on to Lourdes, and eventually to Pilar who will ultimately make her way back to her homeland, suggesting a cyclical aspect to survival.

América’s is also a story of survival. She must overcome a legacy of subordination—generations of women working at the whim of the resort owner—domestic abuse, and marital rape. I think that she exhibits agency by her determination to leave an abusive relationship, which is generally agreed to be extremely difficult, and her willingness to leave what she knows to go to a foreign country where she does not speak the language, and make a new start for herself. But, her most challenging episode is when Corea comes after her in New York, where she has gone to work for a family (who were tourists in Vieques) and fight for her life:

She ducks as the blade comes down, and it burns into her left shoulder. There’s warmth where the blade plunged, no pain, just a burning when he pulls it out and raises it again....The knife flashes silver and red, and in the split second it takes him to lift it, she dodges under his arm....she uses her last bit of strength to kick him hard in the one place she knows she can hurt him....He doubles over with a

groan, and she kicks him again, connects against his lowered face this time, and he turns and falls. There's a crack, like a twig breaking as Correa's head bounces against the angled edge of the granite coffee table. (318)

In terms of survival it is important to note that Corea has followed her all the way to the U.S., that she has been injured, and she still manages to survive the attack and defend herself. He is killed by the fall.

Aurelia epitomizes the matriarch who holds the family together despite any obstacle. She rescues Rebecca from an abusive, deadly relationship. She survives poverty in the Dominican Republic and her rat infested first apartment in the U.S. Yet, she is able to muster a positive outlook on life. When Marina is in the hospital recovering from her attempted suicide, Aurelia wants to “guide her out of despair and offer her foolproof ways to achieve happiness in this world” (141). Again, we see here Aurelia's efforts to pass on this ability to survive, and “[a]lthough an eternity had elapsed since her body had miscarried five fetuses” she still remembered the names she had “prematurely” given them (141). This is in the context of telling Marina how scared she was of losing her, and that she wanted desperately for Marina to understand that “there are other things that make staying alive worthwhile, things that have nothing to do with money, not even with anybody else” (143)—passing on survivorship. América also expresses her desire for Rosalind to have a better life than she has, and to learn from her mistakes, “to share América's dreams for her, to have dreams of her own” (33). Celia, América, and Aurelia all express the desire to pass on this ability to survive to their daughters.



I suggest that García, Santiago, and Pérez are exemplars of authors of exilic texts who put feminist, familial, and political concerns at the forefront. I have been struck by the overwhelming amount of violence contained in these texts. These narrations of incidences of rape and domestic violence, mental illness and suicide, and fraught relationships between mothers and daughters do not allow readers to dismiss the historic and ongoing struggles of immigrants, in particular women, who from the onset, particularly within the cultures we have thus far been looking at, face oppression and violence. Tal suggests that as a reader and critic one “consider the author [and I think it is applicable here as well] as survivor....The shattering of individual myth and the transformation of the protagonist did not happen to the reader; it can only be described and studied from without” (131). The protagonists of these texts have undergone transformations exhibited through their survival of traumatic experiences. Tal’s suggestion is pertinent here because the authors have also gone through exile and immigration. Their depictions of violence and trauma are shocking and unforgettable, and they give voice to the thousands of women who experience brutality, unveil the myth of the American dream, and inspire survival. Esmeralda Santiago explains that her “task is to give voice to people who don’t have the skill, ability, time, or craziness that I have. My characters will always be those people who can’t speak for themselves. I was a child who could not find myself in the literature. There was no one telling my story. I don’t want that to ever happen to any child or any woman” (133). Tal notes Alice Jardine’s argument that “[t]he inscription of struggle and pain is essential in much feminist literature, which is an indication that it may also be examined as literature of trauma”

(136). Indeed, these texts portray struggle and pain, of particular interest here within the context of exile and immigration, and I would argue participate within a tradition of feminist literature.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Laurie Vickroy offers an extensive analysis of Reinaldo Arena's work as participating in the literature of trauma. As a Cuban exile he critiques his homeland, offers testament to past events, and portrays the isolation and alienation of losing one's homeland.

<sup>2</sup> For a psychoanalytic discussion of the intergenerational manifestations of trauma resulting from war and oppressive regimes see Maren Ulriksen de Viñar's "Political Violence: Transgenerational Inscription and Trauma."

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here about, for example, missionary practices of cutting the hair of Native Americans as part of what they considered to be "educational reform."

<sup>4</sup> E. Ann Kaplan provides an overview of the development of Freud's trauma theory in "Why Trauma Now: Freud and Trauma Studies," *Trauma Culture* 24-41.

<sup>5</sup> See "Rhetoric of Wounds: Trauma, Identity, and Interpersonal Relationships in Chuang Hua's *Crossing*" for a discussion of the use of wounding, blood, and medical reference in literature of exile. Nadon claims that "*Crossings* is replete with medical and healthcare imagery which operates on many levels in the course of the narrative, underscoring the emotional and physical wounds of Fourth Jane and her family throughout their lives. These wounds extend from the pain and emotional trauma that Fourth Jane, her father, mother, and siblings experience to the overall psychological well-being of the family as a whole....In the text, trauma and healing operate as metaphors for this ambiguity of identity and the characters' need for emotional security, highlighting the sense of uncertainty and loss which each member of the family experiences as they

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try to cope with the constantly changing world around them” (75). Sara Elizabeth Leek also discusses wound and blood imagery in exile literature, specifically in the work of Nina Bouraoui and Linda Lê. She explores the authors’ use and effect of writing, whether autobiography or fictional narrative, on the trauma of exile.

## CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATIONS OF CULTURAL HEALING IN *THE STREET* AND *THE LINE*  
*OF THE SUN*

This world was one of great contrasts, she thought, and if the richest part of it was to be fenced off so that people like herself could only look at it with no expectation of ever being able to get inside it, then it would be better to have been born blind so you couldn't see it, born deaf so you couldn't hear it, born with no sense of touch so you couldn't feel it. Better still, born with no brain so that you would be completely unaware of anything, so that you would never know there were places that were filled with sunlight and good food and where children were safe.

—Lutie Johnson, *The Street*

Ann Petry and Judith Ortiz Cofer portray the search for the mythic American Dream in their novels *The Street* and *The Line of the Sun*. Lutie's above conclusions about the world suggest the many facets of the American Dream. What is "the richest part of it"? As a mother, as her above conclusion notes, it is a safe place for one's, family, one's children. As an artist with the ambition to be a professional singer, she would expect the American Dream to deliver its promise of success through hard work. I suggest that the protagonists of both of these works search for the freedom to realize their ambitions, and that fundamentally their motivations, struggles, and triumphs share remarkably similar paths. The idealized nation, with its promise of liberty and justice,

eludes the characters in both of these works as social institutions, such as the legal system, confound their efforts to obtain equal employment or fair protection under the law.

Vernon E. Lattin in his characterization of Petry's text and the American Dream argues that "[the author] rebels against the falsifications of life, the dreams, rationalizations, and illusions that distort one's grasp of reality; she rebels especially against the American Dream and all of its attendant illusions, which blind one to the stark, sordid existence that is America. Like all true rebels, she seeks freedom" (69). Indeed, both authors experienced "the stark" and "sordid existence" in the form of racism first-hand. In an interview with Mark K. Wilson, Petry recounts how whites threw stones at her and her sister on the way home from school (76). Rafael Ocasio writes that Cofer's "adolescent years are marked with personal experiences as a member of a marginalized cultural group" and that when her family moved to Georgia when she was fourteen experiences "new forms of racial discrimination" (146). Although both authors experience racial prejudice as youngsters, economically they came from privileged backgrounds. Petry's parents were professionals, her father a pharmacist who owned a drugstore and her mother a licensed chiropodist. They were a "middle-class family" in Old Saybrook, Connecticut (Gates 1496). Cofer's family was more secure financially than many other Puerto Rican immigrants were, due to her father's position in the Navy (Stavans 1895). However, Petry and Cofer use fiction to highlight inequalities based on gender, race, or nationality. Petry's work as a journalist "rubbed her face in the gritty

world of Harlem's poverty, violence, crime, and economic exploitation" (Norton 1496).

In an interview with Edna Acost-Belen, Cofer discusses her motivation as a writer:

I feel very strongly that I am contributing in the only way I know how to contribute....When I wrote about those lives lived in poverty, those lives lived in naiveté and fear in Paterson, what I was doing was presenting a picture of the difficulties of Puerto Rican life in that city....And every time I write a story where Puerto Ricans live their hard lives in the United States, I am saying, look, this is what is happening to all of us. (85-86)

Thus, in a literary passing of the protest baton from *The Street* to *The Line of the Sun*, the authors portray their conviction that the notions of the American Dream that assert the individual's freedom to choose one's path through hard work, unhindered by racism or sexism, certainly are mythic.

Petry and Cofer describe a new world that is cold and unwelcoming, Ramona and Lutie's "pioneering" every bit as harsh as the severe winters of the western frontier. However, the women of these stories find a source of empowerment and healing in the traditional folk medicines of their cultures. For Ramona this means the gods and folk medicines of *Santería*, and for Min, in *The Street*, it means a privileging of the root doctor over the church because "there were some things the church couldn't handle" (123). To interrogate the nexus of healing and empowerment in these two works, that might have been relegated to entirely separate literary camps, is significant. From the moment I first read Min's use of the root doctor I have wanted to explore the ways in which African American and Latina authors similarly utilize folk medicine. I will not be delineating the origins or describing the practices of folk medicine and *Santería* as many texts have already done this thoroughly.<sup>1</sup> Rather, I am interested in exploring the

representation of these beliefs and practices within the framework of the literature of exile. Why do authors repeatedly return to traditional folk medicine and faiths, even up to the most contemporary works of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?<sup>2</sup> I propose that Petry and Cofer turn to traditional folk medicines and beliefs as a source of empowerment and healing for the women in their texts that also position these characters within a legacy of women as seers and storytellers.

Escaping oppressive poverty is a strong motivating factor in both texts. Indeed, this is an accurate portrayal of the economic circumstances of the times. In “Social Polarization and Colonized Labor,” Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles and Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz delineate the various motivating factors for mass Puerto Rican migration during this time, particularly of the rural population: “From the mid-1930’s to the mid-1960’s, U.S. corporate, export-oriented agriculture in the island (sugar and tobacco) went into crisis and decline. This process was accompanied by massive unemployment and a distinct shift on the island toward export-oriented, light, labor-intensive, machine-based industry” (89).<sup>3</sup> They also point out that “the forms of livelihood among populations deemed racially inferior perennially fell below the living standards of the racially dominant and colonizer populations. In the case of Puerto Rico, average hourly wages were only 28 percent of what they were in the United States” (91). Cofer’s character Guzmán, as we shall see, certainly is a precise example of the *campesino* who seeks better economic opportunity in the U.S. Neither author dwells on the hardships of poverty, but rather subtly infuses the texts with the daily realities of being poor, made all



the more poignant by their contrast to the characters' idealized notions of what life in the U.S. will be like.

We will see that in *The Street*, as well as *The Line of the Sun*, New York is a place of hope for a better future. According to Richard Yarborough, "If the direction of expansion—spiritual and demographic—is westward for the American culture in general, for the Afro-American the dominant direction has been from the South to the North....the North has symbolized a place of both refuge and promise" (49). Nicholas Lemann explains in *The Promised Land*, that "between 1910 and 1970, six and a half million black Americans moved from the South to the North....The black migration was one of the largest and most rapid mass internal movements of people in history..." (6). He delineates the economic and political transition from slavery to sharecropping, and cites the cotton picker as making "the maintenance of segregation no longer a matter of necessity for the economic establishment of the South, and thus set the stage for the great drama of segregation's end" (6). Isabel Wilkerson's depiction of blacks' migration from South to North as akin to those from foreign countries is a poignant one: "The people did not cross the turnstiles of customs at Ellis Island. They were already citizens. But where they came from, they were not treated as such" (9). This statement reflects her assertion that the Great Migration "would force the South to search its soul and finally to lay aside a feudal caste system. It grew out of the unmet promises made after the Civil War" (9). These "unmet promises" would take the form of the Jim Crow system that she notes "persisted from the 1880's to the 1960's" (10). Petry and Cofer depict the struggle to

overcome social, political, and economic forces that would otherwise prevent their full participation as citizens.

### Departure

The first half of *The Line of the Sun*, set in a small town in Puerto Rico, portrays the difficult lives of the villagers, made even more difficult because of small mindedness, intolerance, and alcoholism. Cofer explicitly points to small-town thinking as a destructive force and the cause of suffering for various characters when one reads "...the town was small enough in those days to concern itself with small matters" (52). This particular moment in the novel is referring to the community's harassment of Carmelo, Mamá Cielo's son, due to their suspicion that he was gay in light of his close friendship with the priest. Carmelo loves books and poetry and enjoyed discussing these with the priest. This would certainly be an example of veering outside the lines of community expectations. The men are expected to work in the fields and the women in the homes. There is little tolerance for any stepping outside the bounds of dutiful adherence to traditionally expected behavior at school, church, and home. Mamá Cielo is the matriarch of the family. Papá Pepe is one of many spiritists in the novel. But, a major character, particularly of the first half of the text, is their "wild" son Guzmán. Through his eyes, and his good friend Rafael (who will marry Ramona, Guzmán's sister and the narrator's mother), one sees the idealized notions of what American life will be and what success would mean to the would be emigrants. While material wealth is definitely an important marker of success, freedom to choose one's life, such as one's profession, where one will live, or who to spend one's life with, is the ultimate goal, in this text as

well as Petry's. New York is the dreamed of and snowy space where everything is possible. Guzmán, when made to leave Rosa, the local *curandera*, or healer, thinks

of meeting her in some faraway place, maybe even America, and traveling with her to all the places she had described to him. When Guzmán thought of America, which to him meant New York, he saw a great city...with ornate, tall structures and wide streets all in white with *nieve, nieve*. In Spanish the word sounded exotic because so little spoken. It called forth pure breezes and crystalline lakes, and cleanliness not possible where people sweat all the time. (106)

Although he did not want to leave her, he “wanted to be free” (106). Guzmán yearned to get away from Salud where he will always be controlled by his parents and kept under the watchful eyes of a vigilant community. He longs to see new places and have new experiences. New York is portrayed as the ultimate land of opportunity, equivalent to America and, initially, the snow is described as a purifying and beautiful thing. One almost sees some kind of heavenly place described, in these lines, with “ornate structures and wide streets all white.” Also here, the description expresses the discomfort of the heat of the tropical space in contrast to the “pure breezes and crystalline lakes,” and at the same time suggests the interminable work in the field where “people sweat all the time.”

Guzmán and his brother Carmelo had both worked in the field as youngsters. Their father worked two jobs “one painting houses and the other at night, keeping the books at the sugar refinery,” (52) which contributed to Ramona, Carmelo's younger sister, having to take on the responsibilities of an adult in the household. In fact, she would eventually have to quit school to help the family (82). One reads that the “better” homes on the island, Rafael's among them, have “indoor plumbing and mosquito screens

on the windows and doors” (58). The reader can imagine this little area of town called El Polvorín:

In El Polvorín the houses were coming alive with the sounds of women setting pots of water to boil for coffee and getting their brooms and sprinkling cans ready. While their children were getting ready for school and their husbands for work, they would sweep clean their dirt yards, taming the pervasive dust with water so that it would not get into their houses and the laundry they would be hanging on the lines strung from tree to tree. (131)

This paints the picture of a humble town, dust both outside and within (*polvo* the Spanish word for dust or powder) where traditional roles are expected to be followed—the women tending to the domestic space, the men going to work, such a contrast to Guzmán’s imaginings of the great modernity of New York. Yet, this passage foreshadows the romanticizing of poverty that will occur in the harsh reality of New York, later on in the novel. The “taming” of the dust alludes to the taming of Guzmán himself, and of any desires—Rafael’s dream of becoming a doctor someday, Ramona’s dream of escaping Salud—that do not fall within the prescribed roles set forth in this small town.

The reader learns that “by the time [Ramona] entered adolescence, she was tired of children and the endless drudgery of housework” (157). She also plans to convince her future husband that “one child” was more than enough (157). Ramona sees herself “far away from the mountain of diapers, Mamá’s constant vigilance, and her gentle father’s sermons on virtue” (164). So while Rafael will be her means of escaping the drudgery of her household labor in rural Puerto Rico, she does not intend to trade one drudgery for another. She wants to be free. Images from the media fuel Ramona’s

idealization of what life could be like: “Ramona had seen pictures in books of the big cities of the United States. She collected glossy magazines, imagining herself dressed in bright silk dresses with furs elegantly draped over her shoulders like the Mexican movie stars she had seen on the covers” (163).

Guzmán put his name in the lottery<sup>4</sup> which promised men the opportunity to go to the United States to work. In thinking about being reunited with Rosa, he “imagined himself walking on a white carpet of snow in a city of light, his heart leading him to the place where she lived. Together they would explore that wonderful new world where everyone had television sets and drove big cars” (148). In order to lure the young men into farm labor in the U.S. the agents would fuel their dreams by their descriptions of snow “falling like grated coconut from the sky. The children were running around making balls out of it and eating it like ice cream” (152). The way the agents dressed was also enticing to the *campesinos*, who could only imagine such luxurious items. Guzmán noticed the agent’s “expensive watch,” “patent leather shoes,” and “store-bought clothes” (153). Thus, Rafael, Guzmán, and Ramona with their dreams for a better life, material wealth, and most importantly freedom to make their lives what they wish them to be, are New York bound.

Lutie’s idea of the American Dream is similarly influenced by images she sees, but with the difference that as a housekeeper she also witnesses the reality of what material wealth can bring, both its advantages and its failings. *The Street* is focused primarily on the rise and fall of Lutie Johnson. After her marriage fails, she and her son Bub move to a street in New York City, where most of the novel takes place. However,

Petry seamlessly weaves in Lutie's past, her work as a housekeeper for the rich Chandlers, the destruction of her marriage, due in part to the negative influences of her father and his girlfriend and the economic and social forces that prevent her husband from having employment, and the lives of the people around her, particularly the "Super," who lusts after her constantly.

While riding the train Lutie stares at an advertisement:

the advertisement she was looking at pictured a girl with incredible blond hair. The girl leaned close to a dark-haired, smiling man in a navy uniform. They were standing in front of a kitchen sink—a sink whose white porcelain surface gleamed under the train lights. The faucets looked like silver. The linoleum floor of the kitchen was a crisp black-and white pattern that pointed up the sparkle of the room. Casement windows. Red geraniums in yellow pots.

It was, she thought, a miracle of a kitchen. Completely different from the kitchen of the 116<sup>th</sup> Street apartment she had moved into just two weeks ago. But almost exactly like the one she had worked in Connecticut. (28)

The image highlights white privilege—"a girl with incredible blond hair"—also aligning this with the responsible father, a navy man. The colors are bright and surreal, gleaming. This is the epitome of the classic all-American town with the red geranium, and as Lutie looks at the ad it reminds her of the home she worked in for two years in order to provide income for her family. She remembers the tree-lined street, "the most beautiful street she had ever seen" (29), and thinks what a stark contrast this is to the apartment and street she and her son live in now.

Although Petry does not provide vast amounts of information about Lutie's family history or other characters' lives before living in the North, the reader does have glimpses of poverty and violence in the South that remind one of the Great Migration

ongoing. Lutie characterizes “[s]treets like the one she lived on” as “the North’s lynch mobs...the method the big cities used to keep Negroes in their place” (323). We learn that several of the characters have moved from Georgia, for example Min, the Super’s live-in girlfriend. At one point, afraid of Jones, she was “back in Georgia in a swampy, sedgy place, standing mesmerized with fear because she had nearly stepped on a snake that was coiled in front of her” (359). Mrs. Hedges, the proprietress of a brothel in Lutie’s building was also from Georgia.

In the beginning of the novel, Lutie expresses the same kind of optimism that inspires Ramona, Rafael, and Guzmán. She thinks about the strides she has made, through going to night school and hard work: “a wave of self-confidence swept over her and she thought, I’m young and strong, there isn’t anything I can’t do” (63). But, the realities of migration will stun the characters of *The Street* and *The Line of the Sun*, and idealization will turn to realization of the mythic nature of the American Dream.

#### Arrival

The characters of *The Street* and *Line of the Sun* encounter a cold inhospitable northern landscape, unwelcoming in climate as well as by its inhabitants. From the opening pages the cold and wind are prevalent: “There was a cold November wind blowing through 116<sup>th</sup> Street....It drove most of the people off the street in the block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues except for a few hurried pedestrians who bent double in an effort to offer the least possible exposed surface to its violent assault” (1). One notes here the aggressive and harsh nature of the urban space by the “pedestrians bent double,” and “its violent assault,” not to mention the ever-present cold. The snow

even invades the interior spaces: “The cracked tile of the floor was grimy. The snow that had been tracked in from the street during the morning had melted and mixed with the soot and dust on the floor” (311). Where “[o]nly a few hours had elapsed since she stood in this same doorway, completely unaware of the dim light, the faded, dreary paint, the filth on the floor. She had looked down the length of this hall and seen Bub growing up in some airy, sunny house and herself free from worry about money” (311). Thus, one sees initial optimism in the “airy, sunny house” transformed into the grime of mixed soot and snow. This occurs after Lutie’s dreams of becoming a professional singer are destroyed by Junto’s plans to have her.<sup>5</sup> The cold, harsh landscape reflects the brutal treatment the immigrants and migrants receive.

Similarly in *The Line of the Sun*, the initial positive connotations of cold and snow, when the characters imagine the ideal life they will have in the New World, change to reflect the cold harsh realities of immigrant life. One notes the contrast of the snow being like coconut shavings and even something that protects one, when Ramona and Rafael imagine their lives in the north and Ramona expresses her fear that people would fall out of skyscrapers in Nueva York, Rafael assures her that “The snow would keep them from breaking their bones when they land” (167), to their “bitter cold” arrival (169). They are literally unprepared for this cold harsh landscape: “Because she was unable to find an adequate coat in Mayaguez ...we were wrapped like gypies [sic] in shawls and scarves” (169). The cold here foreshadows the difficult times ahead, and their feelings of unbelonging are reflected by their “gypsy” appearance.



Petry and Cofer both portray the systemic racism within various social institutions encountered by the characters. Lutie has no option but to accept a housekeeping job with the Chandlers in Connecticut, which takes her away from her family, because despite all of Jim's efforts to obtain employment he is unsuccessful. Petry leaves no doubt that racism is the cause: "Jim couldn't get a job, though he hunted for one—desperately, eagerly, anxiously. Walking long hours from one employment agency to another; spending long hours in the musty agency waiting-rooms....He would come home shivering from the cold, saying, 'God damn white people anyway. I don't want favors. All I want is a job. Just a job'" (30). Note here, the cold is a consistent metaphor for harsh realities encountered by jobseekers of color. Because the men were not hired, the women were forced to take whatever work they could get: "the women trudged along overburdened, overworked, their own homes neglected while they looked after someone else's" (65). Yarborough asserts that "Lutie recognizes that white society often subverts the Afro-American's access to the American Dream by preventing the black man from gaining work, and thereby weakening the entire family structure" (44). A similar problem is noted in *Line of the Sun*. When Marisol—the primary narrator of the novel—describes the rumor of an imminent strike, she explains that "The loudest complaint was that tempers were out of control in homes where the wife was still working and the man unemployed" (227). However, neither author allows easy conclusions or binary thinking. While they both point out the aspect of racism and unemployment, complex race relations and gender roles are also highlighted. For example, one may note some of the criticism being placed on the men when Petry claims "the men on the street swung along empty-

handed, well dressed, and carefree. Or they lounged against the sides of the buildings, their hands in their pockets while they stared at the women who walked past, probably deciding which woman they should select to replace the wife who was out working all day” (65). Of course, this reflects Jim’s desertion of Lutie when she has to be away for months at a time for her employment. Petry highlights how racism and unemployment create strife within families and communities.

Cofer also examines complex race relations within the work force and how employers will give the job to those who will be forced to accept the lowest wage, due to their circumstances. Marisol narrates

many of the men were out of jobs and hanging around at the bodega, a place I had to visit daily for my mother....I heard men talking about the bosses and the factories, how they hired and fired at will, giving the jobs to blacks moving up from the South or out from New York City—or worse, to newly arrived paisanos, who were desperate for work and would accept low pay and demeaning work conditions (227).

The desperate circumstances of the workers make them easy prey for the arbitrary and unfair hiring practices of the employers. But Cofer, like Petry, also highlights the negative image of the unemployed men who “said, did nothing around the apartment except mess it up, then expected dinner to be done instantly” (227). Thus, not only do Petry and Cofer point out how racist hiring practices cause strife within the family, but also interracial and intracultural discord as well, where blacks, Puerto Ricans, and newcomers must all scrap over low paying jobs. At the same time, I suggest, they are critiquing prescribed gender roles in which the woman, even though the sole income

earner, is nevertheless expected to fulfill domestic duties and have “dinner done instantly.”

Petry also exposes racism within the legal profession. When Jones, the “Super,” successfully accomplishes his plot to get Lutie’s son Bub in trouble with the law,<sup>6</sup> she tries to get help from a lawyer. The lawyer’s disregard for Lutie is the final act that sends Lutie to her eventual destruction. When she goes into his office, the attorney immediately is trying to “figure out how much she would be able to pay” (391). In a way, the lawyer’s depiction of Lutie’s life is an accurate one. First, he does not inform Lutie that this type of case does not require a lawyer, and that she would not need money to get her son out of the juvenile home. Then he proceeds to outline what their “defense” will be:

It’ll be simple. I’ll paint a picture of you working hard, the kid left alone. He’s only eight. Too young to have any moral sense. And then, of course, the street.’

‘What do you mean?’ she asked. ‘What street?’

‘Any street’—he waved his hand toward the window in an all-inclusive gesture. ‘Any place where there’s slums and dirt and poverty you find crime. So if the Judge is sympathetic, the kid’ll go free.’ (391-392)

With a wave of his hand the lawyer, at the same time, notes some realities in Lutie’s life—she works hard and has always been concerned about having to leave her son alone—and virtually dooms her to the events that are coming. He dismisses what has happened as something that is expected from poor slum dwellers. Two hundred dollars is nearly impossible to get, and this makes her vulnerable to the lawyer, Junto (the white man who controls the neighborhood businesses), and Boots Smith who had been her brief

source of hope for a professional singing career. These turn of events are illustrative of Yarborough's claim that "...Ann Petry repudiate[s] the relevance of the American Dream for the Afro-American....white racism is an obstacle against which the individual's weapons of idealism, determination, diligence, and even violence are inevitably blunted" (56).

In *Line of the Sun*, Cofer similarly portrays a character searching for help, but finding racism and stereotyping instead. After El Building burns down, a Red Cross worker, who was "very curious about the fire" asked Marisol to go by herself to see her (273). When Marisol arrives she notes that "She smiled her volunteer smile at me, the one that said *I am here out of the goodness of my heart to help the unfortunate and inferior*" (273). She goes on to explain that she had encountered this similar attitude when trying to find out about her father's whereabouts from the navy. Later on in their meeting Mrs. Pink claims, "There were dozens of people drinking and *carrying on like they do in a tenement building* where the walls are thin as paper" (emphasis mine, 274). Again, here one notes the sarcasm and stereotyping from someone in a position of authority, whose job it is to be helpful to the community. Thus, both Petry and Cofer expose, in details of everyday life, the oppressive nature of racism that migrants and immigrants encounter within social institutions.

### Cultural Healing

Both Petry and Cofer incorporate folk healing practices into their texts. I propose that representation of these folk practices demonstrates their empowering nature for the women of Latino and African American migrant communities and highlights these as

survival strategies for the immigrants and migrants. There is little scholarship related to the character of Min in *The Street*, but I think that her transformation through the use of the root doctor and his prescribed materials and practices is significant in a variety of ways. In the beginning of the novel, Min, Jones's live-in girlfriend, is a mere voice, "a whispering voice talking to the dog" (9). She is described as "shapeless" numerous times, almost as if she were a ghostly character, is completely without power, and has always depended on men and suffered their mistreatment. Before living with Jones, her drunkard husband Big Boy always tried stealing her hard-earned money, so she was delighted when Jones invited her to live with him. When she realizes that Jones has fallen for Lutie, the new tenant, and that this has affected his feelings for her, she resolves to act and is determined to not have him kick her out or worse. She decides to ask her enterprising neighbor Mrs. Hedges where she can find a root doctor.<sup>7</sup> Petry portrays a transformation of the least likely character. Min thinks to herself when she visits the Prophet David's shop:

How had she dared to come here?

It was the first defiant gesture she had ever made. Up to now she had always accepted whatever happened to her without making any effort to avoid a situation or to change one. During the years she had spent doing part-time domestic work she had never raised any objections to the actions of cruelly indifferent employers....It was the same with various husbands she had had....

And here she was sitting waiting to see the Prophet David—committing an open act of defiance for the first time in her life....she was frightened by her own audacity. For in coming here like this, in trying to prevent Jones from putting her out, she was actually making an effort to change a situation. (126-7)

The use of the words “defiant” and “audacity” indicates not only the unexpected nature of Min’s actions, but also societal expectations of her. But even just the decision to go to the root doctor proves an empowering move for her. This passage emphasizes what an extreme departure this is from her previous behavior—she even surprises herself. David the Prophet gives her a red liquid to put in Jones’ coffee every day, candles to burn nightly, and instructs her to clean the apartment spotless daily. He also instructs her to hang a cross over her bed. She is given a protective powder to sprinkle on the floor if Jones threatens to become violent with her (135). The Prophet’s prescriptions will prove to be extremely efficacious.

As previously mentioned, the idealized north was far from the haven migrants had hoped it would be. Petry’s portrayal of Min and the Prophet not only demonstrates women’s empowerment through folk healing, but also the community’s participation in traditions brought with them from the South. Stephanie Y. Michem explains:

In light of the experiences of racism along with migration from the South, African American culture served to construct black cultural territory and strengthened a sense of identity. Black migration patterns did not destroy segregation despite hopes, as Bulkley<sup>8</sup> argued, that race relations would be better in the North. A sense of black identity served to combat dehumanization, returning to the idea of resistance culture. Black folk healing was part of this sense of identity. (56)

Petry demonstrates, through Min’s transformation, the way that the cultural healing that Min turned to was able to help her, in stark contrast to Lutie’s demise even though she had “done everything right.” I propose that Petry enhances her literary protest efforts by including Hoodoo<sup>9</sup> in her novel. Michem asserts that “[f]olk healing was a practical expression of resistance culture, brought from the South to the North, and used to deal

with everyday problems....tied to the efforts to survive and thrive in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds” (57). Petry privileges folk healing over both institutionalized medicine and the church.<sup>10</sup> Min ponders how “[t]he satisfaction she felt was from the quiet way [David the Prophet] had listened to her, giving her all of his attention. No one had ever done that before. The doctors she saw from time to time at the clinic were brusque, hurried, impatient....All they saw were a pair of feet with swollen, painful bunions on them –nigger feet” (136). Similarly, with regard to the church she notes that “[t]he few times she had a chance to talk to the preacher at the church, he interrupted her with, ‘We all got our troubles, Sister. We all got our troubles.’ And he, too, turned away” (136-137).<sup>11</sup> Thus Petry’s critique of American society and the treatment of blacks is profound, leaving no institutional stone unturned.

Jones was immediately affected by Min’s transformation. Even when she gets home from her visit to the Prophet, Jones is “overwhelmed” by the sound her key makes in the door: “Normally Min’s key was inserted in the lock timidly, with a vague groping movement....This key was thrust with assurance” (138). He was intending to throw her out of the apartment, but her “unaccustomed actions surprised him so greatly that when she came into the living room” instead of throwing her out he asked where she had been and “relaxed his fingers until his hand lay limp along the arm of the chair” (139). Her newly found confidence and strategy to counter any efforts by Jones to harm or evict her effectively emasculates him. When he sees the cross on the wall he thinks, even though he does not believe in religion, “to him a cross was an alarming and unpleasant object, for it was a symbol of power....It was fear of the evil the cross could conjure up that forced

him out of the bedroom” (140). Certainly, Petry’s use of the word conjure combined with the highlighting of the object of the cross as having power, particularly as part of David the Prophet’s regime, brings to mind what Mitchem defines as protection: “Because humans and nature are understood as interrelated [in folk healing], it is possible to find ways to counter present or future negative life events and influences. The activities to counter the negative life events are called protection” (16). In fact, as time goes by, Jones suspects that “[f]or all he knew she had been working some kind of conjure on him all along” (285). Although Steven A. Reich asserts that “the folk medicine of the root doctor, Petry reveals, is just another enterprise in which schemers such as the Prophet David exploit the insecurities of the urban masses” (123), I think it is important to note the efficacy of the Prophet’s suggestions. While it is important to consider, as Hazzard-Donald explains, that “the last two-and-a-half decades preceding World War II, [were] marked by Hoodoo’s full entry into the mainstream commercial marketplace, with full commoditization of many of its most publicly visible implements, tools, and supplies as well as a proliferation of exploiters of various types” (91), at the same time one should recognize, as previously suggested, the enduring and efficacious nature of folk healing for a variety of reasons.<sup>12</sup> Petry makes poignantly clear the difficulty for the urban woman at that time to know who to turn to or trust. But as we have seen, when one looks at the outcomes, Petry is privileging folk healing within the African American community over institutional medicine and other institutions that have failed miserably in helping Lutie.



Petry does not allow for any easy answers or conclusions as doubts about the Prophet David are expressed within the text itself. When Min goes to Mrs. Hedges for advice, Hedges warns her, “‘Listen, dearie,’ she said finally. ‘I don’t know nothing about root doctors. Don’t hold with them myself, because I always figured that as far as my own business is concerned I was well able to do anything any root doctor could do...if I were you, dearie, I wouldn’t let him see them bills all at one time. Root doctor or not, he’s probably jest as hungry as you and me’” (120). So, one can see the hesitation and doubt expressed by Hedges, even as she is suggesting that Min go see him. We can also see this complex representation of folk healing in *The Line of the Sun*.

Just as the tradition of folk healing was brought from South to North during the Great Migration, Cofer’s novel portrays a similar adherence to traditions and import of *Santería* from Puerto Rico. The first half of the novel is based in Puerto Rico and demonstrates the significance of the practice to the islanders. Rosa is the practitioner who the townsfolk turn to, but she is both sought after and reviled at the same time. Mamá Cielo takes her son Guzmán to Rosa to see if she can cure him from his wild and evil ways. To Guzmán she is angelic:

The clearing where La Cabra’s house stood was bathed in noonday sunlight when the three of them emerged from the woods....standing on the pedestal, stood a woman in a white dress. Her black hair was pulled back into a tight bun at her neck. Even her sandals were white, so that her paleness was accentuated. She seemed almost a spirit, her substance lost in the folds of her nunlike dress. (23)

The description of the house “bathed in noonday sunlight,” and of the white sandals, “white dress,” “paleness,” “a spirit,” and “nunlike dress” all serve to highlight the edenic

nature of Rosa's home and her angelic qualities. As mentioned previously the small town narrow mindedness is a critique Cofer explicitly makes, and this critique is aligned with a distrust of Rosa and her eventual exile from the town. Rosa uses some familiar items we have seen prescribed by the root doctor in *The Street* in one description of potions and actions she had prescribed: "[s]he recalled the potions she had brewed for many who sent their servants to Rosa with money. Colored water mixed with a little white rum and a few words on a piece of paper. Place the talisman under your husband's pillow, sprinkle this liquid on his food and bathwater, light so many candles..." (93). These instructions are nearly identical to those the Prophet David gives Min to put the red liquid in Jones's coffee and light candles. It is interesting to note the numerous similarities of the practices of folk healing and *Santería*, but perhaps not surprising because of their common source of beliefs brought to America through the slave trade. In the same way that Mrs. Hedges expresses some doubts about the root doctor, Rosa, in her preparations for the town women who will come to evict her, claims that the herbal bath she was about to take was "nothing more than superstition and ritual," but she "followed recipes carefully" (95). So we can see that in the same instance that she expresses doubts about the ritual, she reveals her actual belief in them by asserting that these rituals must be followed precisely. Just as for Min the mere act of going to see the root doctor was an empowering move, similarly for Rosa "[m]erely ... inhaling the aromas of all she had produced, created, and grown with her own hands gave her a feeling of strength" (96). Min and Rosa gain strength from initiating these empowering acts: for Min it is even the idea that unlike before she has followed through on seeing the root doctor, in effect

taking charge; for Rosa it is the realization that she has taken charge and grown her own medicinal plants. Although for both the products are efficacious—Jones loses his power over Min, and Rosa is able to overwhelm the church women who come to exile her from Salud—the acts themselves promote this sense of agency. Thus, for both these characters, participating in the traditional rites of folk healing and *Santería* is an empowering move whereby they take control of their own lives rather than allowing others to control them.

The importation of *Santería* to the continent is a prominent theme in the second half of *The Line of the Sun* and, as in the case of Min in *The Street*, its empowering and enduring nature is emphasized. Toward the end of the novel, there is a large spiritist meeting being planned. When Marisol is on a mission to go to the *botánica* to get supplies, she is stopped by one of the men in *El Building*, who is organizing the strike. Santiago, while he is trying to convince Marisol to help put an end to the spiritist meeting because he feels the police will use any excuse to arrest residents and cause chaos, explains to Marisol:

you should know this about Island women, not little *Americanitas* like you...but women who are brought up to believe that we are not alone in this vale of tears and misery that is a human life. They believe that we have invisible friends, these spirits of theirs, who are supposed to be like loyal dogs, summoned with a whistle, to come help us and defend us from our enemies. They mean well, but here in America their hocus-pocus only complicates thing. (246)

Even as Santiago is being dismissive about *Santería*, referring to the deities as “loyal dogs,” the poignancy of his statement that it is a strategy of survival in “this vale of tears and misery that is a human life” belies the significance of this belief system for the

community, and particularly for the women portrayed in the novel. It is not only their comfort but also their path to agency. Marisol refers to the kitchen as her mother's "control post...giving directions to the women who came in and out with their offerings for the big meeting" (250). Mario A. Nuñez Molina explains, when speaking about *Espiritismo*, but I think applicable also for faith healing and *Santería* practices, that:

Espiritismo<sup>13</sup> is a healing system created by and for the community to deal with its problems, using its own resources and strengths. At Espiritista centers, the community heals itself without relying on professional 'experts.' Community members are in control of their own resources, increasing their sense of empowerment. The Espiritista meeting is a community-oriented ritual that enhances the individual's sense of community and belonging. As a preventive and therapeutic system, Espiritismo is based on the particular strengths and cultural realities of the Puerto Rican community. (129)

As noted previously, the benefits that Nuñez Molina points out as to the community relying on itself and through that, gaining a sense of empowerment and achieving successful outcomes, is evident in both novels. Certainly, we have seen that the success Min had in going to the root doctor far surpasses Lutie's through her attempts to get help from the legal community, law enforcement, or employment in her dream career as a professional singer.

Cofer, like Petry, does not present any easy answers. There is a devastating fire during the spiritist meeting where Elba, a spiritist "who catered to the complex spiritual needs of the tenants," dies (170). Initially, a reader might think the fiery end to this important meeting a gesture of criticism, but I believe, that Ramona's persistent melancholy at the rupture, yet again, from her beloved community would counter this. When Marisol's family moves to a "better" neighborhood after the fire, she notes that her

mother was “lonely and fearful of life in a place where each house was an island, no sounds of life seeping through the walls, no sense of community” (285). Marisol questions, “Where were her plaster saints, the ones who got her through the lonely, difficult times when Rafael was at sea?” (284). At the end of the novel, when Ramona is separated from her community (in the broadest sense of the word: a community of women, immigrants, Spanish-speakers, practitioners of *Santería*), the reader is left with the knowledge that this final rupture will now only find healing in storytelling. Even though Rafael could afford a more expensive home, due to his service in the navy, Ramona had always preferred to live in El Building, with all of its familiar sounds, smells, and cultural practices, among these—a vigorous community of practitioners of *Santería*. Marisol explains that “[t]hough she smiled during the tour of the house....there were no loud exclamations of joy like I had heard at the slightest provocation when we lived in El Building....she had come back from her real home to a place that threatened to imprison her. In this pretty little house, surrounded by silence, she would be the proverbial bird in a gilded cage” (284-5). Ramona experiences a third displacement, at the loss of El Building, and one notes that without the cultural healing available through the practice of *santería*, her prospects for future happiness seem slim.

The practices of faith healing and *Santería* are aspects within a broader spectrum of community healing that empowers women as seers and connects them to their cultures’ traditions and ancestry. Petry subtly develops her representation of women as seers and storytellers and makes these connections through Mrs. Hedges’ uncanny knack for knowing everything that is going on and anticipating events. She is always watchful;

from her window, she monitors all the activities of the street, including Jones. Several times Jones's fear that Mrs. Hedges can read his mind is mentioned: "[n]ow standing here on the street watching Lutie walk toward the corner, he was aware that Mrs. Hedges was looking at him from her window. He was filled with a vast uneasiness, for he was certain that she could read his thoughts" (89). She "spoiled his daily airings on the street, for he became convinced that she could read his mind...He was certain about her being able to read his mind" (93). As the narrative progresses Min's powers of observation are heightened as well: "'He thinks I don't know what's on his mind,' she said to herself....She knew all right, and she also knew what she was going to do about it" (114). After Min sees the root doctor, her protection is so effective that Jones's previous concern that Mrs. Hedges could read his mind is magnified: "Perhaps he had been right in the beginning and she could really read his mind. The thought frightened him so that he stumbled in his haste to get inside" (385). The portrayal of Mrs. Hedges as a seer, certainly keen observer, participates in a tradition within faith healing practices of the seer. Rebolledo, although writing within the context of Chicano literature, points out that "the image of the curandera as a 'seer' is central....often a small child receives hints about her or his destiny from the curandera/bruja" (84). In keeping with this project's goal of transcending borders, I think it is useful to consider the commonalities of faith healing practices, *santería*, and other forms of cultural healing. Petry's inclusion of Hoodoo elements along with the depiction of Mrs. Hedges' keen powers of observation and Lutie's frequent mention of her Grandmother's powers, suggests the text's participation within a tradition of cultural healing that we have been looking at.

At the start of the novel, Lutie recalls her grandmother:

you couldn't be brought up by someone like Granny without absorbing a lot of nonsense that would spring at you out of nowhere, so to speak, and when you least expected it. All those tales about things that people sensed before they actually happened. Tales that had been handed down and down and down until, if you tried to trace them back, you'd end up God knows where—probably Africa. And Granny had them all on the tip of her tongue" (16).

One reads here the dismissive tone, noted previously, but at the same time Petry connects her text to ancestral traditions and folk healing beliefs concerning sensing things before they happen—beliefs, which have been noted, like *Santería*, do indeed originate, in part, in Africa.

Granny and her powers are mentioned numerous times. Lutie thinks, "Granny could have told her what to do if she had lived....Mostly she had been right. She used to sit in her rocking chair. Wrinkled. Wise. Rocking back and forth, talking in the rhythm of the rocker. Granny had even foreseen men like this Super" (76). Perhaps Lutie had even inherited some of these powers herself: "She was afraid of something. What was it? She didn't know....She was smelling out evil as Granny said. An old, old habit. Old as time itself" (413). *The Street*, in a sense, portrays two worlds: the urban world containing the brutal experience of racism and white privilege and a world of tradition where there is the possibility of empowerment, healing, and safety. Indeed, Hazzard-Donald notes that

Hoodoo, for African Americans, embodied historical memory linking them back through time to previous generations and ultimately to their African past....a paradigm for approaching both the world and all areas of social life. Among contemporary African Americans, certain retained aspects of Hoodoo were learned from parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents who passed tales,

information, beliefs, practices, and paradigms to their descendants, sometimes inadvertently. (4)

Bettina E. Schmidt would certainly concur, as seen in her discussion of Afro-Caribbean religions as well as Haitian Vodou, that these “religions can be seen as location of memory in order to conserve information about Africa in new surroundings” (236). As previously noted, Petry makes explicit reference to the passing down of tradition from Africa, and she portrays this through the many references to her grandmother. Lutie recalls the sense of safety she felt with her grandmother who had “always been there....part of the shadow, part of the darkness, making it known and familiar” (404). She contrasts the memories of the safety she felt with her grandmother with her not being able to be there for her son, Bub.

Just as powers of prediction are suggested in *The Street*, as noted above, these powers are similarly present in *Line of the Sun*. Ramona’s father is a seer. Guzmán wonders how his father knew about his plans to go to New York. He knows he had only told Rafael about his plans, so he asks his father how he knew: “‘Son, I see only hardship where you are planning to go. Don’t leave the island’ ‘Papá, how did you know?’ ‘I saw you here,’ the old man pointed to his temple” (145). One of the mediums in El Building, Blanquita is able to “foretell future infidelities and ...punish the transgressions before they happen” (239). But a connection to one’s ancestors, including the grandmother is also portrayed. At the end of the novel Marisol explains that what she inherits that is of significance is the letters from Mamá Cielo and her mother’s stories (286).



Rebolledo explains that “[o]ne striking similarity in the writing of many Chicanas is the importance of their bonds to female family members, *abuelitas* and *tías* (grandmothers and aunts), and friends” (108), and the same holds true for all of the narratives we are exploring. The common bond is that all of the exilic texts discussed here portray the hardships encountered by immigrants and migrants and their efforts to reclaim agency and some amount of peace and comfort by connecting to family, traditions, cultural healing practices, and storytelling. Mitchem reveals:

one communication pattern that can be traced directly back to the African continent is that of orality. The griot kept the community’s stories, or folk tales taught lessons: the art of storytelling has shaped meaning and kept histories for black communities. Even as these African roots can be located, African Americans continue to find ways to carve out clearly identified spaces wherein their humanity is honored. In other words, black people use their cultures to respond to the situations of their American lives. (38)

Karen Castellucci Cox asserts: “stories do have the power to heal” (148). Thus, one sees that Petry and Cofer both portray the transformative power of cultural elements such as folk healing, *Santería*, tradition, family, and storytelling in their novels. Marisol concludes that “the only way to understand life is to write it as a story, to fill the blanks left by circumstance, lapses of memory, and failed communication” (290). Filling the gaps is precisely the concern of the following chapter.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For example see *El Monte*, by Lydia Cabrera, *Afro-Caribbean Folk Medicine*, by Michel Laguerre, *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity*, by Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual, *Healing Cultures: Art and religion as curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora*, ed. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (this work contains a translated excerpt of *El Monte*), and “The Creation of Afro-Caribbean Religions and their Incorporation of Christian Elements,” by Bettina E. Schmidt. Schmidt delineates the roots of Afro-Caribbean religions from the time of slavery and argues against the widely held views of these religions as syncretic.

<sup>2</sup> Although I am focusing this discussion on Petry and Cofer’s 20<sup>th</sup> century works here, other 21<sup>st</sup> century works include Lyn Di Iorio’s *Outside the Bone*, Marta Moreno Vega’s *When the Spirits Dance Mambo*, and Esmeralda Santiago’s *Conquistadora*, just to name a few.

<sup>3</sup> Santiago-Valles and Jiménez-Muñoz explain that these economic shifts led to higher unemployment, a need for more highly skilled labor, and opportunity concentrated in urban areas (92).

<sup>4</sup> Cofer explains that “[t]he lottery had begun during President Truman’s administration to help bring cheap labor to the growers on the mainland and to aid the Island’s unemployment problem after the return of the soldiers from the Korean War” (149). For

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Cofer it is critical to be accurate about historical events as she asserts in her interview with Bridget Kevane.

<sup>5</sup> Vernon E. Lattin points out that “Lutie accepts her lost career as a singer....So she returns to the first dream of hard work, saving, scrimping, studying for a higher civil service rating” (70).

<sup>6</sup> According to Steven A. Reich, Ann Petry “built her novel *The Street* (1946) around a newspaper story about ‘a superintendent of an apartment house in Harlem who taught an eight-year-old boy to steal letters from mail boxes’” (93).

<sup>7</sup> Stephanie Y. Mitchem explains that a “conjurer could also be known as a rootworker because knowledge and use of plant life is part of the practice of conjuring” (20). She explains that these two terms can be used interchangeably. Her text provides a thorough overview of folk healing, its origins, and development up through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchem explains that Buckley was an educator in the early 1900’s. He analyzed racism and migration to the north (56).

<sup>9</sup> Katrina Hazzard-Donald defines Hoodoo as “the indigenous, herbal, healing and supernatural-controlling spiritual folk tradition of the African American in the United States” (4).

<sup>10</sup> Despite this, one can see the apparent syncretic nature of folk healing by the hanging of the cross over Jones and Min’s bed.

<sup>11</sup> Min’s comments about how the traditional clinic and the church treat her highlight one of the many factors that, according to Mitchem, adds to the enduring nature of folk healing. She quotes Loudell Snow’s argument that: “They [cures] are part of a system

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that is holistic...so that the healthy individual is seen as possessing an integrated balance of body, mind, and spirit...the system also continues to exist because, unlike biomedicine, it is not restricted to dealing with matters of health and illness” (71).

Mitchem explains that both the efficacy and holistic approach of folk healing add to its endurance.

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough delineation of the endurance and significance of folk healing see Stephanie Y. Mitchem’s *African American Folk Healing*.

<sup>13</sup> Nuñez Molina explains that “[t]he central principle of Espiritismo is the belief in the communication with the spirit world through intermediaries who are called mediums. Espiritistas consider that good and bad spirits are involved in the material affairs of this life....Espiritismo functions as a religion for some Puerto Ricans, as a healing system in moments of crisis for others, and as a ‘philosophy’ and ‘science for the academically oriented” (116). Margarite Fernández Olmos, in the same text, notes that Espiritismo is derived from European Spiritualism, but that “Cuban Santería, also known as *la Regla de Ocha*, or the belief system of the orichas, is the consequence of a similar process: the convergence of Yoruban rituals and practices honoring the orichas, or deities, with the obligation to worship Roman Catholic saints (santos)...true membership in the Santería spiritual community involves unconditional dedication, rigorous discipline, and lifelong commitment to a particular deity or spirit” (xviii).

## CHAPTER IV

## THE PHOTOGRAPH AND POSTMEMORY IN KRAUSS AND PÉREZ

When he raised up the lens and looked through it, my mother asked what he saw. “The same thing I always see,” he said. “Which is?” “A blur,” he said. “Then why do it?” she asked. “In case my eyes ever heal,” he said. “So I’ll know what I’ve been looking at.”

—*The History of Love*

From the onset of *The History of Love*, Nicole Krauss utilizes the photograph as the privileged way of understanding the past and knowing the world. In this exchange, the blind photographer explains to the young Charlotte Singer that the existence of the photographs insures not only proof of what has been witnessed, but also knowledge of what has been seen. Through this depiction, Krauss confirms that we are all equally blind without the photograph. The photograph is a prominent strategy for Krauss and Loida Maritza Pérez that places them within a tradition of second- and third-generation authors who seek to bear witness, affirm, and renegotiate their past and present. My aim here is to explore the common desire of second- and third-generation children of those exiled to fill the gaps of their histories and to continue the process of “working through” mentioned previously in this work. I will be highlighting how *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss and *Geographies of Home* by Loida Maritza Pérez both incorporate significant narrative techniques that are evidence of the author’s desire to (and I will borrow Morrison’s term here) re-member their familial and collective histories. Quite literally here, the authors narrate a regathering of family and historical events that

profoundly influence these artists' texts, and it would seem, their lives. I assert the transcendent nature of postmemory and that *The History of Love* and *Geographies of Home* are two examples of how postmemory is represented in exilic texts, despite national origin.

My cross-cultural analyses of the literature of exile in this work that begin with the trauma of rupture from the homeland and move to sources of cultural healing and empowerment in the new and unfamiliar landscape encounter a pivotal moment in which the authors imagine a world that reintegrates historic pasts with the present. Hirsch's theory of postmemory is foundational to my observations concerning second- and third-generation authors of literature of exile, immigration, and migration. It is therefore important to look closely at Hirsch's definition of postmemory as outlined in *Family Frames* and reaffirmed in *The Generation of Postmemory*:

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation....Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences. (*Family Frames*, 22)

Hirsch's theory makes a clear distinction between mere memory and postgenerational experience. In contrast to memory of direct experience or knowledge of historical events, in the case of postmemory the individual does not have direct access to the historic events

that nevertheless continue to dominate—in this present investigation—her literary consciousness. Furthermore, Hirsch emphasizes the creative and recuperative aspects of postmemory. Analysis through a Hirschian lens brings second- and third-generation authorial concerns into relief and invites a cross-cultural exploration. After biographical notes on Krauss and Pérez and a brief look at Trujillo's dictatorship, I will turn to the role of the photograph, first in *The History of Love*, then *Geographies of Home*. We will also consider the image and its connection to the past, its function as memorial, and finally the family portrait.

For both Krauss and Pérez, the impact of their families' exilic histories on their world views and approach to their work as writers is remarkably similar. Nicole Krauss was born in New York in 1974. Her parents are English-American, and her grandparents were of German, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Belarusian descent ("Nicole Krauss"). Pérez, born in 1963 in the Dominican Republic, moved to Brooklyn at the age of three (Coonrod 109). As second- and third-generation immigrants, both authors engage in a process of coming to terms with and knowing their family histories, even as they may at times assert otherwise. For example, Boris Kachka points out that during his interview with her "Krauss still seems a touch uncomfortable with the pigeonhole of 'Jewish fiction.' Growing up in a Jewish neighborhood, Krauss 'wanted to have nothing to do with anything Jewish at all.'" Krauss claims, as the two walk around the neighborhood observing "a bialy shop Leo name-drops and housing projects he might inhabit... 'Leo might as well have lived in Baltimore'" (Kachka). In a similar gesture that distances

Pérez from her homeland or at least suggests a kind of objectivity with regard to how being Dominican might enter into her writing, she explains:

although I confront issues of identity, culture, class, race, etc., in my work, it is simply about the condition of being human, what with all its inherent challenges, misunderstandings and misconceptions. In short, I would like to think that my work is about what it's like to be a woman or man, daughter, sister, mother, father, brother, lover, husband, wife, or friend within the context of a modern society. (Candelario 79)

While I would agree that Pérez's novel explores universal issues of family and society, the participation of her text as literature of exile and the representations of discursive strategies of postmemory, particularly the abundant use of the photographic image, is undeniable. As she says, her work is about "the condition of being human," but I would add, a condition overlaid with the traumas of exile. The mission of recuperating lost fragments of family history and history of homeland is also evident in her writing. In fact, in the same interview Pérez reveals that "one thing that holds true for most immigrants from Hispaniola is that—regardless of how long we remain abroad—we are perpetually looking back and remain deeply concerned with the island's welfare even as we are similarly invested in our adopted country" (75). It is this "perpetually looking back" that is a hallmark of postmemory.

Krauss similarly expresses her preoccupation with the past in her essay "On Forgetting":

There is the burden of memory, but there is also the burden of those who know they must remember but cannot. Who when they try to trace back through the years and names and places, always come up against a brick wall past which they cannot go further....Even the lives of my grandparents who came from four



different countries before the war, some of whom came from villages that no longer exist, are lost to me. There is the sadness of remembering, and the sadness of not being able to remember, and in me both of these things live together.

Krauss' and Pérez's novels eloquently reveal Caruth's assertion, mentioned previously, that there are historical traumas that cannot be contained by "any single individual or any single generation" (71). Certainly, their texts inform and remind readers about historical traumas that have occurred in their cultures' histories, give voice to those who have directly and indirectly suffered those traumas, and demonstrate "a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" (Caruth 71).

Unlike Hitler's universally known World War II campaign against Jews and others he considered to be undesirable, which resulted in the killing of more than six million people, Rafael Trujillo's thirty-one year dictatorship in the Dominican Republic is less widely known. His "rule is considered one of the most brutal periods in the history of the Dominican Republic....Those who dared to oppose him were imprisoned, tortured and murdered. Their bodies often disappeared, rumored to have been fed to the sharks" (BBC 2011). A report by *The Christian Science Monitor* of a 2012 commemoration of what is referred to as the "Parsley Massacre" confirms the dictator's brutality. It cites the massacre of more than 12,000 Haitians in 1937 "with machetes, bayonets, and rifles." Trujillo's maniacal motives for this campaign apparently remain somewhat mysterious, but some point to border control and an attempt to "whiten the country."<sup>1</sup> Peggy Levitt focuses her discussion of Dominican immigration on the economic aspects<sup>2</sup>, but she also notes that despite the initial economic improvements Trujillo made, his was "an

oppressive, dictatorial rule” (232). He controlled every aspect of Dominicans’ lives, including wages and travel. According to Levitt, “Dominicans could not obtain food, shoes, clothing, or shelter without in some way benefiting either Trujillo or one of his family members” (233). Because Trujillo did not allow people to leave the country, “fearing his opponents would organize against him from abroad,” few left before the 1960s; however, “[d]uring the 1960s...migration to the United States increased from a yearly average of almost 1,000 people during the 1950’s to nearly 10,000 people per year during the first part of the 1960s” (234). Initially, Levitt explains, immigration was motivated by political unrest, but the economy gradually played a larger role. Pérez brings Trujillo’s presence to the forefront of her novel numerous times, noting that all households had to have a portrait of Trujillo hanging prominently to show their allegiance.

#### Connections to the Past

The image, particularly the photographic image, plays a significant role as an instrument of postmemory in both texts. The image informs the narratives in a variety of ways: it serves to make evidentiary and informational connections to the past, it serves as memorial, is a way of knowing about the world and oneself, and in fact has existential significance. Hirsch asks: “Do pictures provide the second- and third-generation questioner with a more concrete, a better access to the abandoned parental world than stories can?...Photographic images...shape the work of postmemory in important ways” (*Family* 248). In this particular instance Hirsch is speaking of actual photographs, but the same holds true for photographs of fictional narratives, and she refers to these also in her

work. As I mentioned, Hirsch reaffirms her ideas concerning postmemory in *The Generation of Postmemory*: “Second-generation fiction, art, memoir, and testimony are shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma” (34). She goes on to suggest the transcendent nature of postmemory: “Loss of family home, of sense of belonging and safety in the world ‘bleed’ from one generation to the next” (34). Indeed, we will explore the influence of historical trauma and subsequent literary recuperations of second- and third-generation authors.<sup>3</sup>

*The History of Love* is a transnational text whose characters are victims, survivors, and/or witnesses of the Jewish displacement and atrocities which occurred as a result of the Holocaust. Krauss’s narrative highlights the worldwide movement and interconnectedness of the Jewish diaspora. Leo Gursky initiates the reader’s journey via his fragmented world at the start of the novel, where his pressing concern of visibility is immediately made known. It is a story of journeys to the past and future and always searching. Linear as a butterfly’s flight path, Krauss’s plot takes the reader from narrative thread to unraveling narrative thread. Set in New York, the overarching storyline involves Leo’s desire to connect with his son Isaac and lifelong love Alma Mereminski, from whom he was separated by World War II, and teenager Alma Singer’s (Alma Mereminski’s namesake) search for a husband for her widowed mother Charlotte Singer, a translator. Certainly, *History* is a fragmented postmodern narrative in which Leo, Alma Singer, occasionally “Bird” Alma’s younger brother, and Svi Litvinoff from Chile, a friend of Leo’s from his youth in Poland, take turns telling the story from their

point of view. It revolves around a kind of international game of hot potato in which Leo's book *History of Love* is translated, sold, stolen, and returned.

Immediately at the onset of her novel, Krauss utilizes the photograph as memorial and connection to her ancestral past. She dedicates her book in part to her grandparents, represented by their photos, who she asserts "taught [her] the opposite of disappearing." Her reference to disappearing is significant as this is a preoccupation of the protagonist, Leo Gursky. One can associate the photograph with visibility versus invisibility while also conflating that with existence. Krauss's dedication emphasizes her concern with her family history and orients the reader immediately to the postmemorial testament to come. Philippe Codde, in his discussion of Jewish American novels, characterizes Krauss's dedication as reflective of "her ethical imperative to commemorate" and asserts that this is at "the very core of Krauss's own project as a writer" ("Keeping History at Bay" 684).<sup>4</sup>

Photographs involving Leo Gursky highlight the various ways the photo is used throughout the novel. It is evidence of the past and proof of the unreliability of the present. The seminal photo of the novel is one which was taken in Poland "of a boy and a girl standing with their arms hanging stiffly by their sides, hands clasped, knees bare, stalled in place" (67). This photo of Leo and Alma when they were youngsters in love is mentioned numerous times and is proof of how much was lost because of the cruelty of war. Leo and Alma's relationship is a hallmark of lost love and family due to World War II. She is sent ahead to America by her father; she is pregnant and, until her deathbed, Leo is unable to reconnect with her. This photo is described as part of the setting of Litvinoff's room in Chile when he meets Rosa, and is described as "turned at an angle so

that it faced the peeling wallpaper” (67). When Leo ends up at his son’s brother Bernard’s home years later after Isaac’s funeral, he spots the picture. The conversation that Alma and Leo have at the time the photo is taken is narrated, in which Leo is attempting to convince Alma that he should “stand above” her like husbands and wives do (90). Leo says that if he had a camera he would take a picture of her every day so he “would remember how [she] looked every single day of [her] life” (90). Not only the picture, but even the process itself of taking the picture is proof of life. The photos in the novel are more reliable than life itself. Of course, if he is able to take a picture of her every day that means he is always with her. When reading the conversation occurring while the photograph is being taken, one can see that the photo explicitly makes temporal and geographic connections. Leo thinks about the conversation he had with Alma those many years ago while he is standing in Bernard’s home after Isaac’s funeral. Thus, the photo connects Poland, where the photo was taken; Chile, where it is in Litvinoff’s possession; and New York, where it finally comes full circle back to Leo as well as the prewar past and the present. This photo continues to link characters when Leo takes it home with him from Bernard’s home. At one point, Leo returns to his apartment to find Bruno, his very present friend, who actually died in 1941, holding the photograph.

Leo’s concern with invisibility, and thus his existence in light of others and himself, is also established through the photograph. He narrates that in 1947 a cousin of his attempted to teach Leo how to make a pinhole camera, but every time the cousin tried, no image would appear (81):

My cousin insisted we do it again, so we did it again, and again, nothing. Three times he tried to take a picture of me with the pinhole camera, and three times I failed to appear. My cousin couldn't understand it. He cursed the man who sold him the paper....I knew that the way others had lost a leg or an arm, I'd lost whatever the thing is that makes people indelible. (81)

Leo goes on to explain that he took a picture of his cousin and “his face appeared,” and that “if it was proof of his existence, it was also proof of my own” (82). The image of what is seen of course is proof of what is not seen—the photographer. I suggest that this is just one of many instances in which the protagonist is concerned with his visibility to himself and others, and this is one indication of manifestations of postmemory in the novel because visibility is related to the drastic change which occurred due to the traumatic rupture from the homeland. The use of the word “indelible” is significant here when one considers its synonyms such as ineradicable, permanent, and lasting, the opposite of the Jewish community in Nazi occupied territories where Krauss reminds readers that

In the summer of 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* drove deeper east, killing hundreds of thousands of Jews. On a bright, hot day in July, they entered Slonim. At that hour, the boy happened to be lying on his back in the woods thinking about the girl. You could say it was his love for her that saved him. In the years that followed, the boy became a man who became invisible. In this way, he escaped death. (12)

Here we can see the intimate connection between the theme of invisibility, so prominent throughout the novel, and history. Certainly, the catastrophic history concerning the systematic killing of Jews by the Nazis and strategies of survival are at the forefront of

Krauss's work. Through Leo's preoccupation, Krauss sheds light on this quandary as to one's agency post-World War II.

Other traumas are documented with the aid of the photographic image. Litvinoff is one of Leo's friends in his youth and the man to whom he entrusts his beloved book he had written, *The History of Love*. Litvinoff immigrates to Chile. He saves any extra money he had left over to bring his sister Miriam, "the closest sibling in age and appearance, they often had been mistaken for twins when they were little....She'd been in law school in Warsaw until she'd been forbidden to attend classes" (155). She writes to Litvinoff about her marriage to a fellow law student, and enclosed in the envelope "was a photograph taken when she and Zvi were children. On the back she'd written: *Here we are together*" (155). In a sense, this becomes a memorial picture as well because the reader quickly learns that "[b]it by bit, Litvinoff learned what had happened to his sister Miriam, and to his parents, and to four of his other siblings....He learned to live with the truth. Not to accept it, but to live with it. It was like living with an elephant. His room was tiny, and every morning he had to squeeze around the truth just to get to the bathroom" (156). Throughout the novel Krauss reminds the reader of the atrocities committed by the Nazis during World War II. Her intimate portrayal of these memories of loss, and their prominence in the narrative, remind one continuously of losses her own family would have suffered.<sup>5</sup>

Critics note that, in addition to filling in the gaps for themselves, second- and third-generation authors' writings bear witness to atrocities of the past. Alan L. Berger and Asher Z. Milbauer note Krauss's concern with the irrecoverability of what was lost

due to the Holocaust, and that “[f]illing in the absence and countering the loss became major artistic preoccupations governing her entire oeuvre” (66). But they also confirm the importance for Krauss, and I would argue for Pérez as well, of bearing witness:

This question is central to the explicitly Jewish imperative of passing the tradition from generation to generation (*l’dor ve-dor*) and goes to the heart of Krauss’s fiction. It identifies two imperatives: first, to pass on or pass down an inheritance, in this case an intergenerational trauma that transcends generational and chronological boundaries and requires bearing witness; and second, to ensure the existence of yet another generation—children who will receive and transmit testimony, as expressed in the admonition, “Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (Book of Joel 1:3). (67)

Krauss’s desire, indeed sense of obligation, to bear witness to intergenerational trauma, not only transcends generational and chronological boundaries, but boundaries of national origin as well. Certainly, here Berger and Milbauer are speaking about a Jewish tradition of passing on the knowledge to future generations so that their history will not be forgotten, and also to other writers of the Holocaust, but Pérez similarly participates in a tradition of bearing witness to a history that is beyond the exilic experience of her own family.

### The Photograph as Memorial

Photos link characters, times, and places; inform about the past; and offer proof of life, as we have seen. They also act as memorials that connect characters via their experience of viewing. While out getting a coffee, Leo sees a photo of his son in a newspaper. At the precise moment that he is feeling pretty good about life, he notices the photo in the paper someone is reading: “It was a photo of Isaac. I’d never seen it before.



I collect all his clippings, if there was a fan club I'd be president. For twenty years I've subscribed to the magazine where occasionally he publishes. I thought I'd seen every photo of him. I've studied them all a thousand times" (77). The importance of the photo is quite apparent here. It is Krauss's vehicle of choice to demonstrate the character's loyalty to his son, the method of documentation of his son's career, as he has collected all information about him over the years, and also shows how the photo gives Leo the sense that he is somehow close to his son in this way. He wants to speak to his son through the photo: "It was only a newspaper, but I wanted to holler it at the top of my lungs. *Isaac! Here I am! Can you hear me, my little Isaac?* I wanted him to turn his eyes to me just as he had to whomever had just shaken him from his thoughts. But. He couldn't. Because the headline said, ISAAC MORITZ, NOVELIST, DEAD AT 60" (77). Leo's yearning to be with his son, even through the photo, is crushed as this is the announcement of Isaac's death, informing Leo that he will never be with his son. This pivotal moment in the novel, when Leo learns that his son has died, is portrayed through his encounter with the image of his son. This is a devastating loss for Leo, who explains that he never knew how much his son had meant in his life: "The world no longer looked the same....Only now that my son was gone did I realize how much I'd been living for him. When I woke up in the morning it was because he existed, and when I ordered food it was because he existed, and when I wrote my book it was because he existed to read it" (80). Just knowing that his son was alive and staying connected to him through his photographic image and news accounts had been enough.

Another instance of a character's feeling connected to and speaking to the person through the photograph is in the case of Alma Singer's mother. Alma's father dies of pancreatic cancer when she is seven. One of the sections of "My Mother's Sadness" is titled "MY MOTHER KEEPS A PHOTOGRAPH OF MY FATHER ON THE WALL NEXT TO HER DESK," in which she informs the reader that her mother would talk to the photo (50). Again, here we see the memorial use of the photograph and the way in which Charlotte Singer maintains a sense of continuing to be close to her husband through the photographic image.

Photographs become a frame of reference in the novel. Alma compares her fading memories of her father to photographic images: "Every year, the memories I have of my father become more faint, unclear, and distant. Once they were vivid and true, then they became like photographs, and now they are more like photographs of photographs" (192). Even the absence of a photograph, its clarity, or lack of clarity informs characters and becomes the avenue for characters' connecting in the text. Rather than photos reflecting life, one can see here that life emulates the photographs.

Krauss paints a genuine portrait of a child retracing the past, making sense of the present, and imagining the future through the use of the photograph. Just as Alma finds clues to her identity through photos, the son of a World War II veteran, Sean Field explains that "[o]ften it is their children who consciously or unconsciously take on the labor of making sense of what happened in their parents' past, what emotionally remains in the present, and what is carried forward to future generations" (108-9). He describes the photos as "easy access to traces of the past that preceded us and to which my father

was a living link” (114). Ironically, though they had access to their father’s first-hand account, it is primarily through photographs that Field and his brother piece together the traumatic experiences their father endured that so dramatically affected how he would parent his sons. Field’s testimonial as the son of a survivor of the war, along with his description of the role of photographs, provides further insight into this consideration of second- and third-generation authors.

The photograph connects Leo and Alma Singer as well. Their independent viewings of Isaac’s photo on his books inform the characters and create a shared space of knowledge. One first notes Leo’s observation of his book photo when he goes to the aid of a man who locked himself out of his home (Leo had been a locksmith). Leo notices that the man indeed has one of his son’s books, *Glass Houses*, on his shelf. When he turns the book over to look at his son’s picture, it becomes a portal into the past. He remembers meeting his son at a book signing and being unable to identify himself in any logical way, much less inform Isaac that he is his father: “I tried to say something but there was no sound. He smiled and thanked me. And yet. I didn’t budge. *Is there something else?* He asked. I flapped my hands. The woman behind me gave me an impatient look and pushed forward to greet him. Like a fool I flapped” (25). He was never able to identify himself. The characters can connect to and through the photos more effectively than even face to face. Alma Singer also sees a book cover picture of Isaac. According to Jessica Lang, Alma’s role in *The History of Love* is another indication of Krauss’s generational concerns: “...perhaps the most ‘Jewish’ aspect of Krauss’s novel is not her development of a Holocaust survivor’s character, but the sense

that she conveys of the ties linking younger and older generations, those who participated in the events of the Holocaust directly and those who can know it only indirectly” (48).<sup>6</sup> Lang goes on to assert that “[t]he Holocaust survivor depends on members of succeeding generations both to remember the past and to live anew, to relate to history that has not been directly experienced by them and, also, to create their own individual histories” (48). Thus, the photograph is used as a reference point as well as an intergenerational tool.

In her research to find a husband for her mother and the literary Alma after whom she is named, Alma makes a shocking discovery at the library. She finds one of Isaac Moritz’s books, *The Remedy*: “I found his books, I took *The Remedy* off the shelf. On the back cover was a photograph of the author. It felt strange to look at his face, knowing that the person I was named after must have looked a lot like him” (195). She discovers that the Jacob Marcus she has been replying to for her mother in hopes of sparking a relationship is the name of the protagonist of *The Remedy*. The significance of this for the present exploration of photography and postmemory is the self-identification that occurs between Alma and Isaac. She is connecting to the author, Isaac, and wondering how much he must look like the woman she was named after—a kind of literary ancestry. These two instances of the book photo, one in which Leo sees his son and thinks about his failed attempt at communication and the other in which Alma sees a potential suitor for her mother (the son of whom she’s named after but turns out to have already passed away) exemplify the photograph’s major impact in all that is *The History of Love*. It connects Alma and Leo in a way that even knowing each other, based on the characters’

interpersonal relationships portrayed in the novel, likely would not. As they both ponder the image of Isaac Moritz, they get closer to their eventual encounter with each other.

Another instance in which even the absence of a photograph is noted is when the owner of a second hand bookstore in Buenos Aires unpacks several books and one of them catches her eye—*The History of Love*—which had been plagiarized by Zvi Litvinoff. She reads the book before selling it: “The owner of the secondhand bookstore lowered the volume of the radio. She flipped to the back flap of the book to find out more about the author, but all it said was that Zvi Litvinoff had been born in Poland and moved to Chile in 1941, where he still lived today. There was no photograph” (74). It goes on to say that she sets the book out in the window. It is interesting to note here that even the absence of the photo is highlighted as a gap of knowledge—“all it said was.” The book flap provides key information about Litvinoff, but the absence of the photo amounts to not really knowing anything about the author. This also adds to the sense of Litvinoff’s anonymity as plagiarizer of the novel. The interesting twist here is that the copy of the book is purchased by David Singer, who will be Alma’s father.

#### The Family Portrait

*Geographies of Home*, like *The History of Love*, gestures to the past at the onset. The prologue begins with a reference to Bienvenida, the grandmother of one the main characters of the novel, explaining that on her deathbed she notes Aurelia’s absence. The connection from generation to generation is explicit:

When informed that her youngest daughter was not present, she turned to the chipped saints atop her bedside table...Then, as if exhausted, she fell back against the pillows and closed her eyes. In the province of Azua, Aurelia bolted upright

and pulled the string of a lamp in time to see a large black cat jump from beneath the bedcovers and flee the room. The hairs on her neck bristled. Her heart beat faster. (ix)

Loida Maritza Pérez's beginning of her novel encourages an exploration of representations of postmemory in her novel. References to ancestors, the homeland, and the concern with family history and, again here, to visibility are some of the narrative themes similar to Krauss's that highlight their common features as literature of exile. There are allusions to the Dominican Republic throughout the novel, but specifically here I am concerned with the numerous references that demonstrate a desire on the part of the characters, if not the author herself, to piece together or recover a past experienced as a second-generation immigrant. For example, Iliana upon her return home from college realizes that "her memory had consisted of images imbued with the warmth of a Caribbean sun magically transported to New York and of a house furnished with objects lovingly carved by the inhabitants of an island she had dreamed of" (30). Her family home in Brooklyn is virtually wrapped in a halo of memory and idealization of a homeland transported to the United States. She has to dream of this island because she does not have the first-hand experience her older siblings and parents have. Furthermore, her characterization is idealized and avoids the traumatic experiences concerning Trujillo that her parents' narrations describe.

Pérez devotes an entire chapter of her novel to Iliana's observation of a formal family photograph. Each sibling in turn is described, and one reads what characteristics are revealed by the photo. Its significant position in the household is noted: "within a gilded frame hanging between the living room's two windows and just below the only

photograph taken of Aurelia and Papito in the Dominican Republic” (40). We are informed that it is a formal photograph and as such the four children depicted, Marina, Beatriz, Iliana, and Tico, are “arranged chronologically....But unlike earlier photos...this one captured the sisters when they were of equal height, freezing the moment in time before Beatriz surpassed Marina by one and a half inches and Iliana shot up another four” (40). It is significant that the description suggests all being equal at this moment because it makes other distinguishing features more pronounced. Also, one should note the phrase “freezing the moment,” which points out that the photo captures this point of the siblings’ development while highlighting the illusiveness and rapidity of time simultaneously.

Each sibling is described in detail—what they are wearing, the positioning of the body, their expressions, and what these expressions may reveal. Beatriz “smiled effortlessly....Her chest leaned coyly toward the camera....Long black hair curled loosely around her face” suggests her carefree and flirtatious character (40). Iliana’s concerns about her body are revealed here: “So ashamed was she of her sprouting breasts thrusting rebelliously against her brassiere that she sat with shoulders hunched, attempting to shrink herself into a former size” (41). Her shame and discomfort concerning her developing body foreshadow future concerns about beauty and femininity that I have noted in chapter two. Iliana’s study also reveals many topics explored in the novel such as gender and race.

Her inspection also looks for any signs of future difficulties or traits that could have been detected. Here, she is looking for information from the photograph that is unavailable in daily life:

Iliana stepped closer to inspect the photograph. She tried to detect any previously overlooked traits which might have hinted at Marina's future breakdown. Yet her eyes kept shifting to Tico, Beatriz, even to herself....It is as if a door inside her had willfully slammed shut against a complete view for fear of recognizing something not in her sister but in herself: some shared genetic trait able to hint at her own susceptibility to madness. She involuntarily found herself checking off their differences to persuade herself that although they had been conceived in the same womb it did not follow that he too would lose her mind. (41)

Iliana wants to find evidence in the photo that will distance her from Marina and her psychological problems. She wants to learn from the photo but clearly is afraid of what she will find.

Iliana's study of the family photograph also exposes societal ideas about beauty. She claims that Beatriz was beautiful, but certainly aware of it: "Even in the photograph her pose demanded attention as it had done in life" (42). Beatriz is dismissive of Iliana, but Iliana considers how Beatriz had "focused her venom on Marina. No one, she had claimed, would ever consider her attractive. Not with her baboon nose and nigger lips" (42). Thus, we see Beatriz's bigoted ideas concerning beauty. However, having beauty will prove not to be enough, as when Iliana leaves home for college before her, Beatriz feels that she is so "outdone" by Iliana's success that she leaves the family an insulting note, never to return.

These ideas about beauty are closely tied to Iliana's narration of her family's, and society's, expectations of her as a woman. She has never thought of herself as beautiful,



but her college friend Ed convinces her that she should wear contacts instead of glasses.

Her negative self-image actually leads her to see other possibilities about what life could be like:

Remembering the insecure teenager she had been, Iliana wondered what it was that had inspired her to pursue an education when what she had needed most, according to members of her family, was a husband able to provide for all her needs. She suspected her decision had stemmed from an inability to imagine that anyone would ever want her for a wife....she had spent most of her time observing her family and immersing herself in books. As a result, her perception of what the world could offer had expanded, and she had wanted more than her sisters had obtained. When her brother Vicente left for college, she, despite being female, had claimed similar possibilities for herself. (43)

Iliana goes on to explain that Vicente helped her convince “her parents that it was respectable, even desirable, for a single woman in the United States to abandon home for school” (43). One sees the family history and dynamics depicted through Iliana’s narration as she examines the photo. But, as we have seen here, the family photo is also a vehicle for observing society and Iliana’s family’s place as Dominicans within their new world. She describes how she and Vicente had to persuade her parents about American views concerning women and education.

Towards the end of Iliana’s analysis of the photo, she notes that Tico is the favorite child, and even as she is exploring this formal family photo, other photos are brought into the discussion: “Iliana remembered other photos of him astride a wooden pony, at the wheel of a fire engine, and atop an emerald tricycle—all toys her parents had been unable to provide for their other children” (44). The sibling rivalry is evident here. She goes on, however, to remember how when he was beaten in school by some older

children, she “heaved up everything she’d eaten” (44). Their rivalry does not overwhelm Iliana’s protectiveness of her brother. The reader also learns in this instance that Iliana, like many immigrant children who are the translators for their parents in schools, must be the bearer of bad news for her mother who does not speak English. Through the photographic image, Pérez has depicted the immigrant family, family dynamics, and societal views on race and gender.

Hirsch explains that “[b]ecause the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics” (Family 7). However, we see that Pérez thoroughly dismantles the family photograph and its myth-making through Iliana’s exploration. Hirsch asserts that

the ideology of the family is as much subject to particular historical, social, and economic circumstances as the lived reality of family life. What may be constant, however...is the existence of a familial mythology, of an image to live up to, an image shaping the desire of the individual living in a social group....I would like to suggest that photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life. (Family 8)

Through Iliana’s eyes, the reader is brought into the “lived” reality of this particular family. Pérez’s narration describes the contrast between a depiction of “the ideal family” that Hirsch is discussing here—which an uncritical viewing of the family photo, with its tidy poses, gleaming smiles, even standardized heights might have neglected to reveal—and the reality of family dynamics, poverty, sexism, and racism that Iliana’s description exposes.

At the end of Iliana's lengthy study of the family portrait in chapter six, she observes the "enlarged copy of the photo her mother had long ago preserved in one of the family's many albums" (44). She describes the blurred aspect of the photo that is a result of its enlargement. I suggest that the distortion of the image demonstrates Hirsch's claims as to the disparity between reality and mythology and may also serve to indicate the transcendent nature of displacement. In other words, Aurelia and Papito's portrait could stand in for the millions of displaced parents who struggle to make a life for their families in a new land. Certainly, if Aurelia had replicated a photo that is already preserved in the family album, it is the image she wants to portray of herself and Papito. The blurred result also suggests its incapacity to reflect reality. Iliana notes that "Aurelia and Papito each appeared to be of indeterminate race and age. They neither smiled nor frowned but gazed unflinchingly at the camera as if prepared to confront whatever challenges life might throw their way" (44). The image appears to intentionally blur the most basic of information to be derived by the viewer and yet proclaims the couple's tenacity and ability to survive. Iliana notes how "neither smiled nor frowned," defying the artificiality of the portrait pose. She goes on to describe that

[a]t the center of their impenetrably dark pupils, pinpoints of light—possibly a trick of the camera—receded far back into their heads so that, although their faces appeared to shield emotions, their eyes suggested stories only waiting to be told.

Iliana ached to hear those stories. Knowing little of her parents' lives, she wanted to learn of the past of which they rarely spoke. She also wanted to borrow from both the strength she saw reflected in their eyes. (44)

Here, Hirsch's ideas of postmemory are so poignantly represented. First, the "impenetrably dark pupils" and the faces that "appeared to shield emotion" suggest an unknowable mystery. Iliana explicitly expresses her longing to know her parents' stories and to draw strength from them. The reader is informed that the parents rarely speak about their past lives, which is a hallmark of postmemory's conundrum—the second- or third-generation's desire to know an unknowable and unattainable past.

The difficulty for Aurelia and Papito's children to know and learn from the past is portrayed throughout the novel with reference to photographs, as we have seen, but also explicitly stated:

She also thought of the many more things she had never revealed to her children or her grandchildren: details of their own and of their family's past which might have helped them better understand themselves as well as the world through which they moved....Look at her grandchildren whose fragmented views of their lives led them to blame themselves for circumstances over which they had no control....at Iliana perplexed by traits she had inherited from her grandmother and been told nothing at all about. (298)

Thus, these gaps in knowledge about family history are clearly revealed as a significant cause of present problems in the family, and, as Aurelia thinks about her grandchildren, the reader is informed that their "fragmented views" will have repercussions for generations to come.

Pérez, like Krauss, utilizes the photograph in her novel as a point of reference. In this passage, Marina expresses her desire to know her past as well. As she walks through one of the neighborhoods she admires, she envisions herself in one of her favorite homes, looking out instead of in:

climb[ing] a flight of stairs to the top floor she assumed must be an attic....The faces and words of those who built the house and bequeathed it to their descendants blurred from sepia photographs and faded letters. She felt their collective past reach like tendrils through the walls and floors. Her own history twined with theirs, forming an extensive web of roots that assured her she too belonged as surely as did the oak outside. (85)

The imagined relics document a dignified past that Marina yearns to be a part of. The photographs described here would suggest continuity and tradition in the family—a stark contrast to Marina’s own reality in which not only does she not have an elegant home, she is uprooted from her homeland.

After a violent episode with her father, Iliana references the photograph. She tells her mother that she is moving out and thinks about how she will remember things in the future: “It dawned on her then that should Aurelia die she would have to refer to a photograph to remember the details of her face” (315). Again, we can see here the prominence of the photo in many situations. The photo is the most reliable tool of memory, and even as she is looking at her mother’s face Iliana is thinking about the photo she will need in the future in order to remember her mother.

As we have seen, the photographic image becomes a way of knowing for the authors as well as the characters in the fictional worlds they have created. The photos of Krauss’s grandparents at the start of her novel become ground zero of a journey that participates in a vast cultural movement. The beginning of Pérez’s novel as well points to the importance of one’s legacy by initiating the text with *Bienvenida*, the grandmother of one of the primary characters, whose cultural lessons come dangerously close to being lost to future generations. Yvonne Singer confirms the significance of photos and the

family album. She explains that she was very young when her family immigrated to Montreal and that she had an overwhelming desire to know her family history: “I obsessively scanned the family albums seeking to understand where to locate myself....They present an unofficial history of a family or a group, often focused on happy events....the family album has power as nostalgia and often as an idealized representation of a time, place, and people” (264). Krauss and Pérez’s characters—Leo, Alma, and Iliana— similarly gaze at and reference photographs obsessively in order to understand themselves and their world. Gerard Bach in his discussion of collective identity argues that “Holocaust writers have been concerned with portraying strategies against forgetting as a moral imperative for their own and future generations. This desire to bear witness has not...slackened with the younger generation of writers, those whose own lives have been shaped by the Holocaust as narrative, that is, by indirect—but no less impressive—means of testimony or witness” (79). He goes on to point out Neil Postman’s assertions that “human existence is made meaningful not through facts and the ability to apply them but through stories....The validity of Postman’s observation in our context is made clear as we witness the widening range of fiction defining, for our age, the patterns of identity formation through acts of remembering” (79). I am suggesting that the use of the photographic image in Krauss and Pérez’s texts is integral to the storytelling process that serves to meet the postmemorial tasks of identity formation, bearing witness to future generations, and as Singer puts it, “fill[ing] the memory void” (266).

For Krauss and Pérez, filling in the gaps of a history unknown firsthand and bearing witness through their testimonial texts is evident. Many note the postmemorial writing by those generations after the Holocaust. However, as we can see from Pérez's work, the process of working through cultural trauma and reclaiming one's past transcends ethnic boundaries. I suggest that the observations made by authors such as Sara Horowitz, Janet Burstein, Claire Kahane, and Nelly Furman with regard to post-Holocaust generations are applicable as well to the exilic loss encountered by Pérez and others who have been forced to leave their homelands. Horowitz explains that "[l]ike Leivick, like Wiesel, I write about what I do not have" (120).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Kahane explains: "This is a document of my effort to mourn, first my parents...who, years after their deaths, still remain provocative internal presences shadowing my consciousness, and the family members I never knew who died in the Holocaust, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins who by their very absence entered my family life and determined much of its shape" (30). The generational sense of mourning is asserted by Nelly Furman as well in her discussion of the film *Shoah*: "as the presence of the daughter suggests, the trauma of survival proposes itself as an event not just the mother's own. Like a family heirloom, the trauma of survival is passed on from mother to daughter, inscribing itself from one generation to the other as an encrypted family legacy"(68). These comments point to the generational passing down of cultural trauma and various representations of the trauma.

Alan Berger asserts that "by virtue of inheriting the Holocaust, the second-generation witnesses remain apart from American culture ...in their determination to

achieve a *tikkun* of bearing witness to an event that, for most American, ended in the dim past fifty years ago” (190). Perhaps, as in Berger’s view, the second-generation remains apart from the American culture, but they certainly become a part of a vast American diasporic community of exiles who share a desire to bear witness to and create awareness of the traumatic pasts of their homelands. Here I am also thinking about the sampling evident in this project of Cuban-American and Dominican-American writers who, as Berger puts it, “seek a *tikkun* of both the self and the world” (11).

Burstein explains that second generation fiction does not necessarily focus on the event itself—the subject matter is not the Holocaust—“but its aftermath” (49). *The History of Love* and *Geographies of Home* do not focus on the Holocaust nor Trujillo’s thirty year rule of terror. Rather, these historic episodes permeate their pages, as I have noted, through memories and postmemorial strategies, in this study specifically the use of the photograph. Photographs serve as memorials to what has been lost, such as for Leo Gursky the love of his life Alma, for Litvinoff his sister Miriam. They can also be evidence of strength and survivorship as in the case of the blurred photo of Aurelia and Papito. The photographic image is a way of knowing: Gursky, his son; Alma, the author Isaac Singer; Iliana, her family’s past. Yet, as we have seen, Krauss and Pérez disrupt the traditional myth-making role of the family portrait. Both Leo and Iliana yearn for an irrecoverable past, but the authors insure that these pasts are not forgotten.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Fieser explains that the name of the massacre came about because one of the “tests” to determine nationality was the pronunciation of the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*.

When soldiers asked who they thought might be Haitian identify the sprig of parsley at hand “mispronunciation of the ‘R’ – difficult for native Creole speakers – was enough to get you killed.”

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough delineation of the economic roots of Dominican migration to the United States and discussion of transnationalism please see Peggy Levitt’s “Transnational Ties and Incorporation: the Case of Dominicans in the United States.”

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Codde explores how the use of myths and fairy tales is a function and strategy of postmemory in second- and third-generation authors (“Transmitted Holocaust Trauma”).

<sup>4</sup> Codde utilizes Hirsch’s concept of postmemory to explore how Jonathan Foer and Nicole Krauss utilize fiction to, in some cases, recreate and rewrite the past (“Keeping History at Bay”).

<sup>5</sup> Codde notes that although Krauss’s grandparents survived the Holocaust “they lost nearly all of their relatives” (“Keeping History at Bay” 684).

<sup>6</sup> Here Lang is also referring to Alma embarking on a journey that is ultimately drawing her closer and closer to Leo.

<sup>7</sup> The collection of essays in *Shaping Losses* explores post-Holocaust writings and artistic representations of this traumatic event. Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkovitz explain that “Cultural memory refers to ethnic group consciousness of the past and provides the

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philosophical and historical foundations for ethnic, religious, and racial identities” (1).

Horowitz in this instance is pointing out how the early loss of her mother permeates her writing.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

Although Iliana knew that she still had to leave, she did not pull away. Like her mother's and father's too, her soul had transformed into a complex and resilient thing able to accommodate the best and worst. Everything she had experienced; everything she continued to feel for those whose lives would be inextricably bound with hers; everything she had inherited from her parents and had gleaned from her siblings would aid her in her passage through the world. She would leave no memories behind. All of them were her self. All of them were home.

— *Geographies of Home*

Iliana's thoughts at the end of *Geographies of Home* reveal the complexities of exile: the trauma of dislocation, the fraught familial and ancestral connections, the search for belonging and identity, the ability to survive, and the imperative to remember.

Although at this moment of the novel she is leaving her family's home, it is also representative of the broader experience of dislocation and exile. Just as her mother and father demonstrate resilience and adaptability in their immigrant experience, Iliana finds that she has the ability to overcome obstacles. Similar to the conditions in the Dominican Republic that precipitated the exile of Iliana's family, violence and lack of freedom cause this third dislocation for Iliana. The epigraph confirms a legacy of survival: "Like her mother's and father's too, her soul had transformed into a complex and resilient thing" (321). The postmemorial aspect of this second-generation novel that I have demonstrated

in the previous chapter is also evident here as Iliana “would leave no memories behind” (321). Iliana, just like exiles around the world, establishes “home” as a state of being within herself in which she gathers ancestral gifts, memories, and strengths.

Ultimately, Iliana’s story is the classic American tale of the immigrant experience that has always been a part of the American story. Like Cristina García’s narration of a Cuban family seeking freedom in the United States—a family torn apart as a result of Castro’s communist regime—Loida Maritza Pérez portrays a family seeking freedom but embroiled in the hardships of the exilic frontier. Similarly, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Ann Petry, and Esmeralda Santiago depict the ever elusive search for the American Dream. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the protagonists’ quest for a better life encounters many hardships. Racism in particular is a common thread in these novels that batters the characters’ every step along the way toward their goals.

I would hope that this project could impact both the study of American literature and pedagogical approach. As I have demonstrated, the literature of exile *is* American literature. Previously, García, Santiago, Pérez, and Cofer would all be relegated to the study of Latino Literature. While the merit of such a study goes without saying, my consideration of Cofer and Petry’s strategies of survival and Krauss and Pérez’s narratives, both illustrative of postmemory, indicates that their projects transcend the borders of race or ethnicity. These are American texts that reflect the national foundation as a nation of immigrants.

I have structured my study based on a logical progression that the elements of trauma, healing, and memory follow from the moment of traumatic rupture from the

homeland, to encounter with a foreign and hostile landscape, and finally a desire of second- and third-generation authors to bear witness to their familial histories. I address the creative process of “working through” that authors engage in through their depictions of violence. García and Pérez, as authors of texts based on what would be a traditional definition of political exile, portray violence prominently. In this chapter I begin to blur the lines of demarcation traditionally drawn to include Santiago’s text in a comparative analysis. Her depiction of a Puerto Rican immigrant’s flight to escape domestic violence and her protagonist’s plight as a domestic worker for an Anglo family upon her arrival to New York invites a consideration of the similarities portrayed in all three texts, despite the motivating factors of immigration or their different countries of origin.

Following my discussion of trauma, I again call into question traditional lines of inquiry to consider Cofer and Petry’s portrayals of the immigrant and migrant. Just as Puerto Rican immigrants come to the United States seeking a better life, African Americans travelled north during the Great Migration to find greater opportunity than they had in the south. Unfortunately, both encounter many obstacles that would work to prevent the migrants from achieving their dreams. I have shown how authors highlight racial discrimination that prevents individuals from getting jobs or receiving fair treatment by the legal system, among other obstacles. However, through the use of folk healing and *Santería*, the women in their tales obtain a sense of agency.

I demonstrate that the use of the photograph is a postmemorial strategy utilized across cultural lines in the literature of exile. Both Krauss and Pérez, as second- and third-generation exiles, are concerned with familial histories that they themselves in

many ways do not have access to, yet which color their lives inescapably. Both authors seem to resist being defined by their histories, yet both are creatively engaged with them. I have highlighted Krauss's continued efforts to renegotiate the past. Her protagonists find themselves and each other, in part, through the creative space of the photograph. She welcomes the reader into her fictional world through a photographic portal of sorts, flanked by her ancestors. Even as Pérez claims, as indicated in my research of her, that she simply writes about the human condition, the Dominican imperative to gaze homeward and to concern oneself with the history of the Dominican Republic is ever-present in her writing. What is left behind for both? Loved ones lost and places perhaps irretrievably lost, for Krauss certainly. However, this did not just happen to them as individuals or individual families, but to nations. For readers it is important to recognize that their stories recuperate personal, familial, and national histories and demonstrate the remarkable ability of humans to survive while not forgetting.

This exploration raises questions about discounting the author when analyzing exilic works. The works reflect authorial concerns about justice as well as their personal experiences as exiles and migrants. To disregard the authorial contexts, I contend, is to limit one's understanding of the significance of the text's power to provide insight into a fundamental American experience—immigration and dislocation. When Lourdes tears Pilar from her Cuban grandmother's lap, I cannot help but think that García's own rupture from the homeland is made clear to the reader. Does Pilar's attempted journey back to Cuba reflect the desire on the part of the immigrant to repair a refracted identity? In Krauss's own words, not forgetting is paramount.

One of the most significant conclusions to be drawn based on this exploration that is especially focused on women's writing is that whatever the home country or region might be, whether Poland, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the southern United States, or Cuba, the portrayals of women in exile overlap in a variety of compelling ways. Each novel does not exhibit the elements I have discussed—trauma, healing, memory—in equal measure, and I recognize that each story is unique; however, they share common aspects to a variety of degrees. When one looks at the literature of exile written by women as a whole, these elements I have discussed are present to one degree or another. I would hope for an expansion of this study to confirm this, and I believe that this could be fruitfully accomplished by broadening this study even beyond American literature to include contemporary migrations occurring worldwide.

Ultimately, these authors seek justice. The representations of violence in these texts, the process of “working through,” and the postmemorial strategies discussed all serve to promote an immediacy of public response. Taking into consideration the recent tragic incidences of intolerance, police brutality, and terrorism, the contemporary reader can appreciate the authors' protest projects. As previously noted, some of these authors have been quite explicit about their desire to make a difference and to create awareness of peoples' experiences as a result of racial, gender, and ethnic biases. Santiago and Pérez both highlight domestic abuse and racism. Cofer writes about Marisol's encounter with the racist Red Cross worker who blames the Puerto Rican community for the tragic fire that occurs in *El Building*. Petry brings race and gender issues to the fore by showing how Lutie is prevented from being able to realize her dream of being a professional

singer and Min's subjugation by the man she is living with. García and Krauss bring attention to the cruelty of Nazism and dictatorship. I assert that the authors of my project bring political concerns to the forefront and that considered in concert their message is all the more clearly understood.



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